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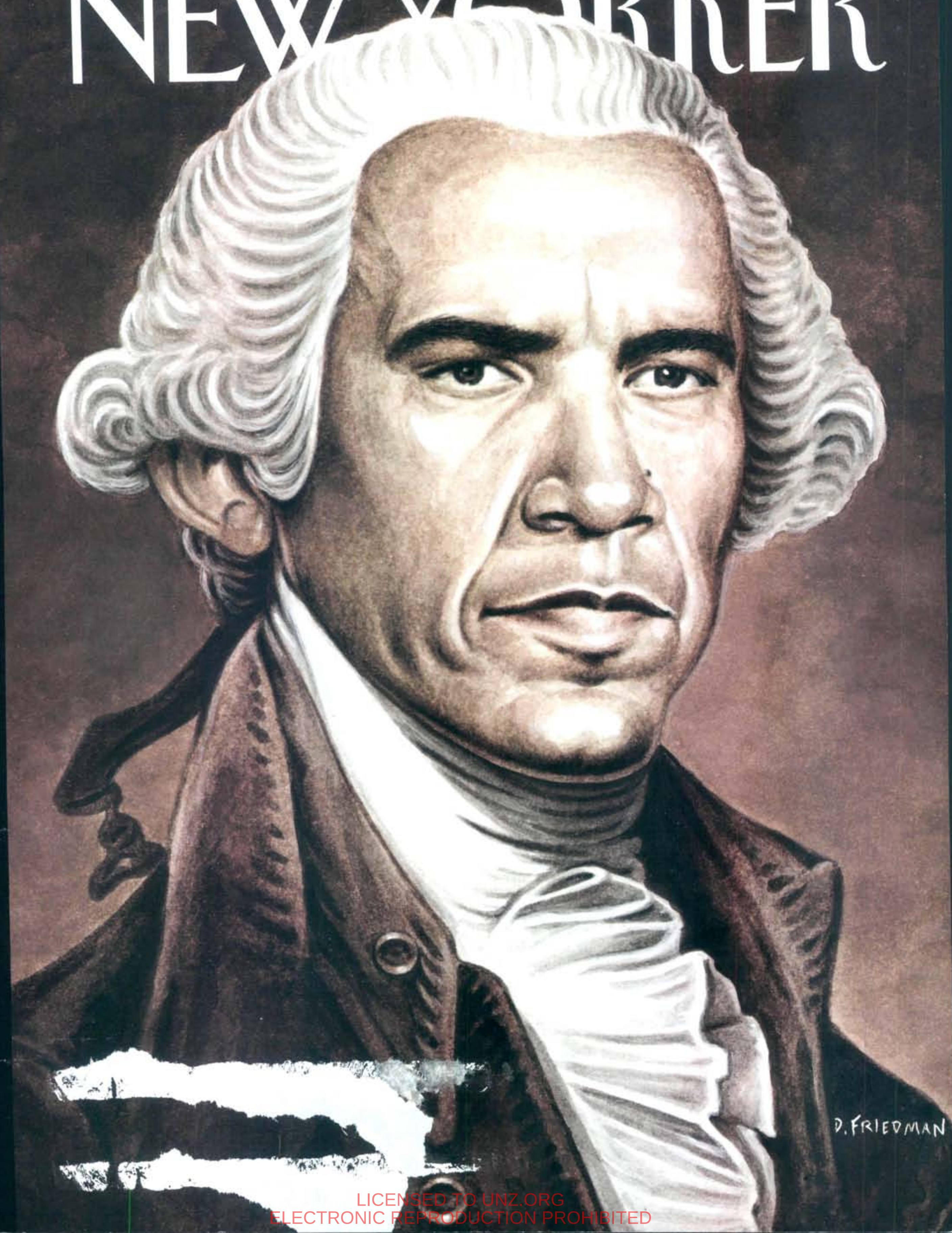
THE NEW YORKER

JAN. 26, 2009



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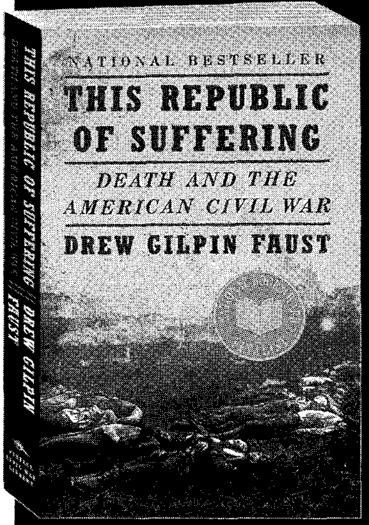
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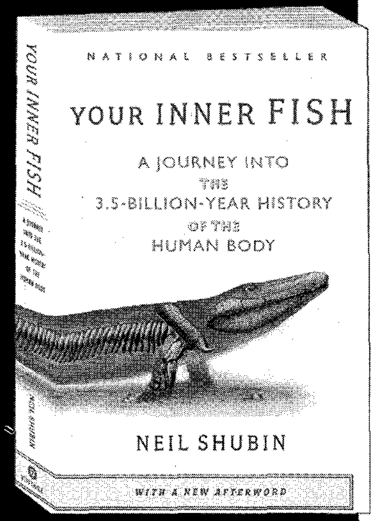
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NEIL SHUBIN
WITH A NEW AFTERWORD

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—Oliver Sacks

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THE NEW YORKER

JANUARY 26, 2009

6 GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN
21 THE TALK OF THE TOWN
Nicholas Lemann on Presidential greatness; James Surowiecki on the stimulus.

Atul Gawande 26 ANNALS OF PUBLIC POLICY
Getting There from Here
How health-care reform really happens.

Noah Baumbach 34 SHOUTS & MURMURS
Mouse au Vin

Arlene Croce 36 ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS
Balanchine Said
The choreographer's celebrated utterances.

Ben McGrath 40 AMERICAN CHRONICLES
The Dystopians
Among contemporary doomsayers.

Calvin Tomkins 50 PROFILES
Man and Beast
Walton Ford's revisionist nature paintings.

Aravind Adiga 58 FICTION
"The Elephant"

THE CRITICS

Jill Lepore 68 A CRITIC AT LARGE
Newspapers and the American Revolution.

73 BOOKS
Briefly Noted

Sasha Frere-Jones 74 POP MUSIC
Of Montreal and disco semiotics.

Hilton Als 76 THE THEATRE
Young Jean Lee's irreverence.

Gary Giddins 78 JAZZ
Bill Frisell's eclectic collaborations.

David Denby 80 THE CURRENT CINEMA
"Notorious," "Cherry Blossoms," "Wendy and Lucy."

POEMS

C. P. Cavafy 28 "It Must Have Been the Spirits"
Susan Stewart 44 "First Idyll"
Robert Pinsky 54 "Last Robot Song"

COVER *"The First," by Drew Friedman* DRAWINGS *Drew Dernavich, Gahan Wilson, Charles Barsotti, Roz Chast, George Booth, Leo Cullum, Paul Noth, William Haefeli, Danny Shanahan, Matthew Diffee, Frank Cotham, Joe Dator, Pat Byrnes, Emily Flake, Zachary Kanin, Alex Gregory* SPOTS *Benoît Jacques*

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CONTRIBUTORS

Atul Gawande ("Getting There from Here," p. 26) was a health-policy adviser in the Clinton Administration. He is an associate professor at Harvard Medical School and at the Harvard School of Public Health, and the author of "Better."

Nicholas Lemann (Comment, p. 21), a staff writer, is the dean of the Columbia School of Journalism.

James Surowiecki (The Financial Page, p. 25) writes about economics, business, and finance for the magazine. His book "The Wisdom of Crowds" is available in paperback.

C. P. Cavafy (Poem, p. 28) was born in 1863 in Alexandria, Egypt, where he died in 1933. Daniel Mendelsohn's translation, with commentary, of his complete works, including the first English translation of the thirty "Unfinished Poems," will be published in March.

Noah Baumbach (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 34) wrote and directed "The Squid and the Whale" and "Margot at the Wedding."

Arlene Croce ("Balanchine Said," p. 36) was the dance critic for *The New Yorker* from 1973 to 1998.

Ben McGrath ("The Dystopians," p. 40) is a staff writer.

Calvin Tomkins ("Man and Beast," p. 50) published "Lives of the Artists," a collection of *New Yorker* Profiles, in October.

Robert Pinsky (Poem, p. 54) is the author of, most recently, "Gulf Music," a book of poems. His libretto for "Death and the Powers: A Robot Pageant," an opera by the composer Tod Machover, will première in Monte Carlo in September.

Aravind Adiga (Fiction, p. 58) won the 2008 Man Booker Prize for Fiction for his début novel, "The White Tiger," which is out in paperback.

Gary Giddins (Jazz, p. 78) teaches at the CUNY Graduate Center. His book "Jazz," written with Scott DeVeaux, is due out later this year.

David Denby (The Current Cinema, p. 80), a film critic for the magazine, has written three books, including "Snark," which has just been published.

Drew Friedman (Cover) is an illustrator whose work appears regularly in the New York *Observer* and *The New Republic*.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM
Dispatches from the Inauguration of President Obama, in Washington. / Audio: *Dorothy Wickenden* hosts a weekly political roundtable. / *Ben McGrath* talks about doomsayers. / Ask the Author: *Atul Gawande* takes readers' questions about health-care reform. / Video: Bill Frisell plays and talks about jazz. / The Book Bench, the Cartoon Lounge, Goings On, plus blogs by *Hendrik Hertzberg, George Packer, James Surowiecki, Steve Coll,* and *Sasha Frere-Jones.* / A complete archive of every issue, back to 1925. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a list of *New Yorker* events.

THE MAIL

NEW JOURNALISM

Louis Menand offers a thoughtful and illuminating history of the *Village Voice* and its legacy, and thoroughly examines the paper's influence on the proliferation of alternative weeklies throughout the country ("It Took a Village," January 5th). Yet I wonder if that is a legacy to be particularly proud of. I've read many fine alternative weeklies, but, on the whole, it is not a pretty picture. A quote from Dan Wolf, one of the *Voice's* founders, on the paper's editorial policy summarizes my lament: "The *Village Voice* was originally conceived as a living, breathing attempt to demolish the notion that one needs to be a professional to accomplish something in a field as purportedly technical as journalism." Perhaps I'm alone in thinking that the demolishing of this notion hasn't exactly been beneficial. So what if the *Voice* and its editors "opened up an insecure and defensively self-important profession" and "had the courage to live by its wits"? Their model, whether adopted or reacted against by other alternative weeklies, has done little to improve the accurate and rigorous reporting of information. I realize that it was the genius of the paper's editors to realize that such "boring" (also called "objective") and professional journalism wouldn't fly in the Village, but I don't consider such an act of lowering the bar to be a great success story in the long and proud history of American journalism.

Paul O'Mara
Milwaukee, Wis.

Menand's report of our death ("After 1970, the alternative press died out") is greatly exaggerated. In fact, that was right around the time the alternative-newspaper business was getting started. (One could have read about the phenomenon in Calvin Trillin's piece "Alternatives," in the April 10, 1978, issue of *The New Yorker*.) Contrary to Menand's assertion, "mainstream" publishers entered the game late and have never had any real success in this business. The progenitors of the alternative press—newspapers like the Boston *Phoenix*, the Chicago *Reader*, the Phoenix *New Times*, and the San Francisco *Bay Guardian*—were founded by trailblazers so far out of the mainstream that forty years later even a scrupulous publication like *The New Yorker* seems to have forgotten that they exist.

Richard Karpel
Executive Director
Association of Alternative Newsweeklies
Washington, D.C.

GETTING HELP

Amanda Fortini's portrayal of addiction treatment for celebrities shows the irony that paying more does not guarantee access to the most current therapies ("Special Treatment," December 1, 2008). The program that Fortini describes appears to base its services on a treatment model that is more than thirty years old, with latitude and luxury as added inducements. Although clients may or may not receive some benefit, they are vulnerable to unnecessary relapse risk if more contemporary treatments are not also made available. For example, research funded by the National Institutes of Health has identified several medications that reduce relapse in early recovery from alcohol dependence. Newer behavioral approaches, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy and motivational interviewing, also increase recovery and provide alternatives to the traditional Twelve Step approach (which in updated form is also effective). This menu of services makes possible truly individualized treatment and increases client choice and engagement, but only if people have access to it.

Mark L. Willenbring
Director, Division of Treatment and Recovery Research
National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, Md.

•

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. All letters become the property of The New Yorker and will not be returned; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

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THE NEW YORKER
speakeasy
love is strange

On February 14th,
The New Yorker will début a new
series of cabaret-style evenings,
The New Yorker Speakeasy.
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Deborah Treisman

Gabriel Byrne

Jeffrey Eugenides

Grizzly Bear

Victor Rasuk

Karen Russell

and more

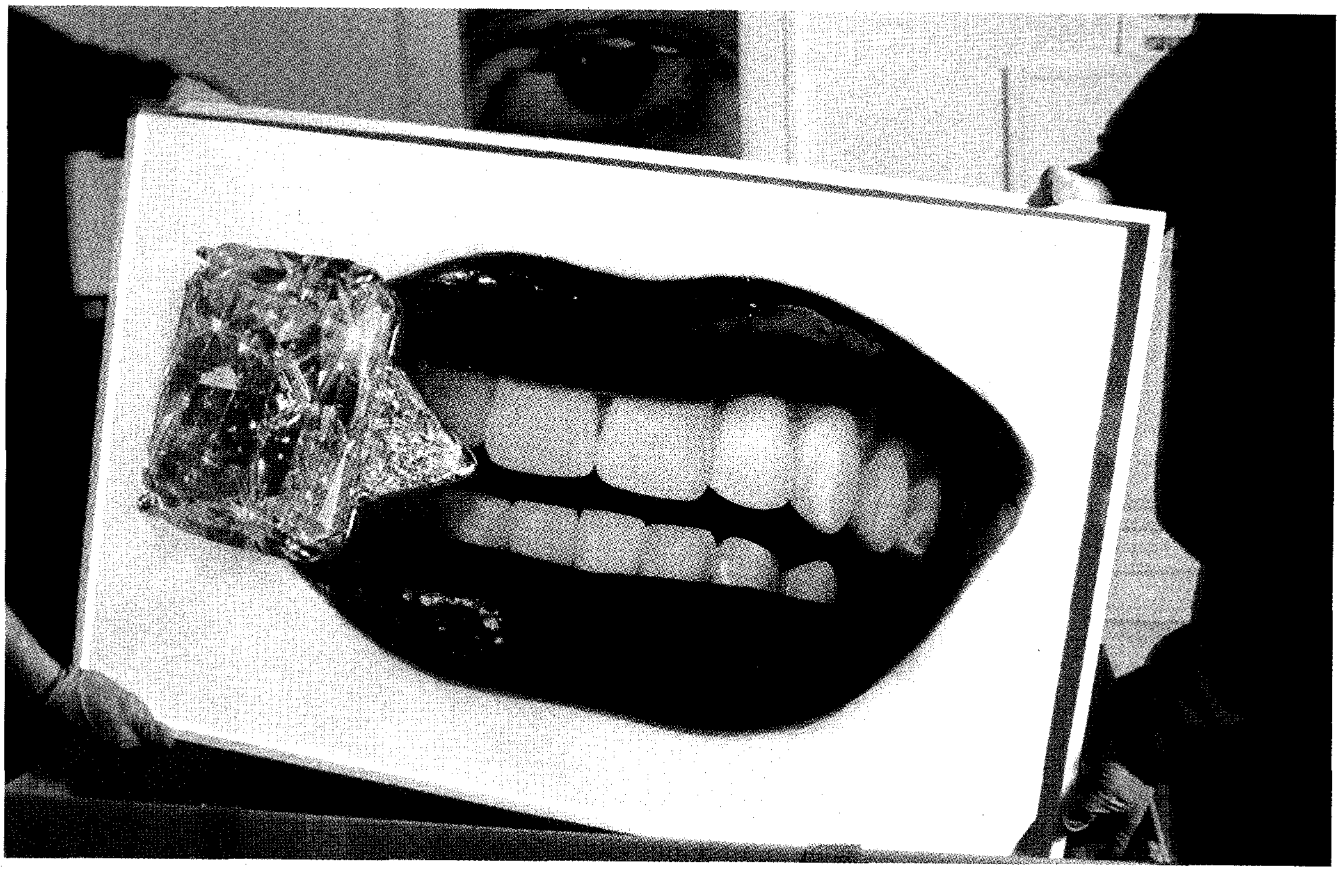
Look for more details in next week's
issue of the magazine.

Valentine's Day
Saturday, February 14th
8 P.M. (doors open at 7:15 P.M.)

Galapagos Art Space
Dumbo, Brooklyn

Tickets go on sale Monday, January 26th,
at smarttix.com.
$15

Standing-room tickets will be
available at the door.
$10



"Weird Beauty," at the International Center of Photography. Photograph by Yola Monakhov.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
25	26	27	21	22	23	24

THIS WEEK

NIGHT LIFE
WILD THINGS

Animal Collective, a vibrant experimental ensemble that plays edgy underground rock, has a new album, the swirling, headphone-conducive "Merriweather Post Pavilion," as well as two shows this week—one at the Grand Ballroom, the other at the Bowery Ballroom. (See page 9.)

ART
LUCK OF THE DRAW

A hundred and twenty works on paper made over a span of five hundred years—from the beginning of the Renaissance to the turn of the twentieth century—by masters from Carpaccio to van Gogh are on view in "Raphael to Renoir: Drawings from the Collection of Jean Bonna," opening at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. (See page 10.)

DANCE
MIAMI HEAT

Generally considered one of the finest ballet companies around, Miami City Ballet will make its Manhattan début this week, at City Center, with only six performances. Two dense programs include Balanchine's "Symphony in C" and "Rubies" and Twyla Tharp's "In the Upper Room." (See page 12.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
HIGHLAND MALT

Mary Zimmerman's daring production of Donizetti's "Lucia di Lammermoor" at the Met may have aroused conflicting opinions at its première in 2007, but the casting for this season's revival is unlikely to disappoint—Anna Netrebko and Rolando Villazón will take the leading roles. (See page 13.)

MOVIES
KINGS OF QUEENS

While the Museum of the Moving Image undergoes renovation, its World Cinema Showcase is being held at the LaGuardia Performing Arts Center, in Long Island City. The year's program begins with "In Between Days," about a teen-age Korean immigrant's struggle with her new life in America. The director, So Yong Kim, will be on hand for a discussion. (See page 17.)

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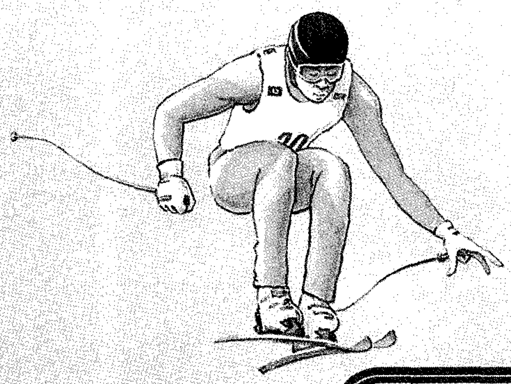

THE NEW YORKER

ON THE SLOPES

AT BEAVER CREEK

FEBRUARY 26–28

COMEDIAN
MARTIN SHORT
"If I'd Saved, I Wouldn't Be Here"
Saturday, February 28

MUSICIAN
CHUCK MANGIONE
Friday, February 27

ADVANCE FILM SCREENING
PHOEBE IN WONDERLAND
DIRECTED BY: DANIEL BARNZ
PRODUCED BY: BEN BARNZ
Thursday, February 26

Need a lift this winter? On February 26th, the *New Yorker* Promotion Department hits the slopes of Beaver Creek, Colorado, for three days of culture: comedy, cartoons, concerts, film previews, and, of course, superior skiing. With special guests and some of the magazine's most celebrated talent, it's certain to be the peak of your playtime this season.

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
FACING THE MUSIC

In "The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach," released in 1968 and shown that year at the New York Film Festival, Jean-Marie Straub and his wife, Danièle Huillet, devised a movie entirely devoted to a historical re-creation of Bach's music. The performers wear wigs and coats and are jammed into uncomfortable spaces in churches as they play long passages of the "St. Matthew Passion" and many other works, each scene filmed from a single fixed angle by a camera often perched behind or to the side of Bach (Gustav Leonhardt) as he conducts or plays the harpsichord. Anna Magdalena, Bach's second wife, recites a flat factual narration of Bach's frequent humiliation at the hands of aristocrats. His sublimity was in service to haughty nonentities. At the same time, the filmmakers verge on haughtiness themselves in their stern refusal to allow the slightest trace of joy or spontaneity to creep into the music or Bach's busy life. Screening at Walter Reade on Jan. 23, as part of a tribute to Richard Roud, who co-founded the Festival and ran it for a quarter-century.

—*David Denby*

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

THE AMERICAN PLAN
Manhattan Theatre Club presents Richard Greenberg's play, set in the nineteen-sixties, about a young woman who lives across the lake from a Catskills resort and falls in love with one of its guests. Mercedes Ruehl and Lily Rabe star; David Grindley directs. In previews. Opens Jan. 22. (Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

ARISTOCRATS
Irish Rep presents Brian Friel's drama from 1979, about a wealthy family gathered for the wedding of the youngest daughter. Charlotte Moore directs. In previews. Opens Jan. 25. (132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

BLANCHE SURVIVES KATRINA IN A FEMA TRAILER NAMED DESIRE
Todd Parmley directs Mark Sam Rosenthal's satire solo show, which imagines Blanche DuBois as a victim of Hurricane Katrina. In previews. Opens Jan. 25. (SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555.)

DISFARMER
St. Ann's Warehouse presents a new puppet-theatre work by Dan Hurlin, inspired by the life of the hermetic Arkansan portrait photographer Mike Disfarmer. Previews begin Jan. 27. (38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.)

EMILIE'S VOLTAIRE
Kevin Confoy directs Arthur Giron's drama, set in the eighteenth century, about the love affair between Voltaire and the mathematician Gabrielle Émilie le Tonnelier de Breteuil. In previews. Opens Jan. 22. (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

ENTER LAUGHING
A return engagement of the York Theatre Company's amiable revival of this 1976 musical, based on Carl Reiner's semiautobiographical novel, about a talentless actor. In previews. Opens Jan. 27. (St. Peter's, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 212-935-5820.)

FRESHWATER
At Women's Project, Anne Bogart directs the only play written by Virginia Woolf, a comedy centered on the photographer Julia Margaret Cameron, Woolf's great-aunt. In previews. Opens Jan. 25. (424 W. 55th St. 212-239-6200.)

FREUDIAN SLIPS
The world première of a farce by Marvin Lifschitz, directed by Tom Bloom, in which Sigmund Freud has a showdown with his rival, Dr. Otto Brotto. Previews begin Jan. 24. (Abingdon, 312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

HEDDA GABLER
Mary-Louise Parker, Michael Cerveris, Paul Sparks, Peter Stormare, Lois Markle, and Ana Reeder star in a new adaptation by Christopher Shinn of the Ibsen drama, about a woman trapped in an unhappy marriage. Ian Rickson directs the Roundabout Theatre Company production. In previews. Opens Jan. 25. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS
At the New Victory, Scotland's Visible Fictions presents a re-creation, using action figures, of Jason's voyage in search of the Golden Fleece. Opens Jan. 23. (209 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010.)

KRAPP, 39
Michael Laurence wrote and stars in this drama, about an actor obsessed with Samuel Beckett's play "Krapp's Last Tape." George Demas directs. Opens Jan. 21. (SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555.)

LOOKING FOR THE PONY
J. Smith-Cameron and Deirdre O'Connell star in Andrea Lepcio's comic drama, about sisters dealing with breast cancer. Stephan Golux directs. In previews. Opens Jan. 23. (McGinn/Cazale, 2162 Broadway, at 76th St. 212-579-0528.)

MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA
Lili Taylor and Jena Malone star in the New Group's production of Eugene O'Neill's trilogy, based on the Oresteia, set in a New England town at the end of the Civil War. Scott Elliott directs. Previews begin Jan. 27. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

RIDE
Nick Flint directs the New York première of a play by Jane Bodie, an absurdist look at modern sexual politics. Opens Jan. 21. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

RUINED
Manhattan Theatre Club and the Goodman Theatre present a drama by Lynn Nottage, about a businesswoman caught in the civil war in the Republic of Congo. Kate Whoriskey directs. In previews. (City Center, Stage I, at 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

SHIPWRECKED! AN ENTERTAINMENT—THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF LOUIS DE ROUGEMENT (AS TOLD BY HIMSELF)
Primary Stages presents the New York première of a play by Donald Margulies ("Dinner with Friends"), an adventure set in nineteenth-century England. Previews begin Jan. 27. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

SIXTY MILES TO SILVER LAKE
At SoHo Rep, Anne Kauffmann directs the world première of Dan LeFranc's two-character play, which spans seven years, about the relationship between a boy and his father. In previews. Opens Jan. 22. (46 Walker St. 212-941-8632.)

THE THIRD STORY
M.C.C. puts on a new play by Charles Busch, who stars, along with Kathleen Turner, in a farce that combines the fairy-tale, sci-fi, and gangster genres. In previews. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

TWELFTH NIGHT
J. R. Sullivan directs the Shakespeare comedy, at the Pearl. In previews. (80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

UNCLE VANYA
Maggie Gyllenhaal, Peter Sarsgaard, Mamie Gummer, and Denis O'Hare star in the Chekhov play, directed by Austin Pendleton. In previews. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101.)

YOU'RE WELCOME, AMERICA. A FINAL NIGHT WITH GEORGE W. BUSH
Will Ferrell performs a one-man comedy show, directed by Adam McKay. In previews. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

NOW PLAYING

THE BLUE BIRD
In Witness Relocation's adaptation of Mikuni Yanaihara's dance-theatre play, a group of scientists, in lab coats and bright-blue wigs, venture into the forest, on a search for the last bluebird in an age when the birds are disappearing and "humans have lost their impulse to look up at the sky." (In Japan, we learn, Bluebird Syndrome is an actual condition, caused by having grown up too passively.) Though a bit unwieldy—there are scenes incorporating scientific talk, absurdity ("You can mix insects and humans and make superheroes!"), dancing animals, projected clips from a Godzilla movie, and a metatheatrical interlude—the play is ultimately inspired and fun. On a recent afternoon, a special guest performer, John Grady, danced in a business suit to "Are You Experienced?," moving exactly like a butterfly and making butterflies seem more thrilling than rock stars. (CSV, 107 Suffolk St. 212-868-4444. Through Jan. 24.)

THE CHERRY ORCHARD
The Bridge Project presents Tom Stoppard's new translation of Chekhov's play. Sam Mendes directs; Simon Russell Beale, Sinéad Cusack, Rebecca Hall, Richard Easton, Josh Hamilton, and Ethan Hawke star. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100.)

THE CONNECTION
Jack Gelber's drama, from 1959, about a group of young heroin addicts holed up on the Bowery waiting for a fix, put Julian Beck and Judith Malina's Living Theatre on the map when it débuted there, half a century ago. Gelber and Beck are both gone now, but Malina is alive and well, at eighty-two,

RUTH GWILY

and celebrating the play's fiftieth anniversary by staging it again. Three hours is a long time to watch junkies sleep, pace, scratch, stare into space, get on each other's nerves, and occasionally say something profound, but maybe that's the point—no one can escape the wish for transcendence. Despite the outdated lesson in suffering, the play has an unusual authenticity; the performers (including the Renè McLean Quartet, whose members both act in the play and play terrific jazz throughout) are so convincing that you end up wondering if they actually are junkies being paid to play actors. (Living Theatre, 19 Clinton St. 212-352-3101.)

EIGHT
From the Edinburgh Festival Fringe comes Ella Hickson's octet of monologues, delivered by British twentysomethings on the subjects of sexuality and alienation. Many deal with the uncertainty of erotic freedom—a schoolboy describes a dalliance with an older Mediterranean woman, a high-class hooker laments the decline of the English gentleman. In one of the more affecting vignettes, a financier finds himself adrift after surviving the London terrorist attacks of 2005. Still, the majority of them are too pat to fit Hickson's ambitions of defining a generation, and the worst play like trite short stories, prone to clichés of character (a gay gallerist with a dead lover) and of language ("your black blood ran inky over my clean, white palms"). (P.S. 122, First Ave. at 9th St. 212-352-3101. Through Jan. 25.)

OSCAR AND THE PINK LADY
Rosemary Harris portrays all of the characters in Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt's adaptation of his novel, about a hospital-ridden ten-year-old boy with cancer. Frank Dunlop directs. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 212-307-4100.)

THE SHIPMENT
A new play written and directed by Young Jean Lee. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11.)

SOUL OF SHAOLIN
If last summer's Olympic opening ceremonies left you aching for more high-flying Chinese kitsch, here comes a walloping kung-fu extravaganza, from the bluntly named producing company China on Broadway. Set in ancient times (the plot is so flimsy it's surprising that the performers don't simply smash it over their heads), the nearly wordless show follows a young man who is separated from his mother as a child and raised by monks. Which is really an excuse to show us bodies: airborne, shatterproof, cracking whips and lifted by spearheads. It's hard to deny the agility of the performers, who appear to be made of granite and rubber, though their efforts are in service of a truly hokey spectacular intent on pummelling its audience into awe. (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

TEN BLOCKS ON THE CAMINO REAL
David Herskovits directs the Tennessee Williams play, presented by Target Margin Theatre. (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-352-3101.)

Also Playing

AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY: Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BECKY SHAW:** Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422. **BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL:** Imperial, 240 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **CHICAGO:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **THE CRIPPLE OF INISHMAAN:** Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200. **EQUUS:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS:** Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-4100. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200. **JERSEY BOYS:** August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. **THE LION KING:** Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4747. **PAL JOEY:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300. **SHREK THE MUSICAL:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **SLEEPWALK WITH ME:** Bleecker Street Theatre, 45 Bleecker St. 212-239-6200. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **SPEED-THE-PLOW:** Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 39 STEPS:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **WICKED:** Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Jan. 23: The pop-music veteran **Dionne Warwick.** Jan. 24: Though they haven't had a hit in years, the eggheaded Long Island heavy-metal institution **Blue Öyster Cult** continues to make hard rock safe for sci-fi geeks. Jan. 26: The Gotham Ole Opry revue harks back to the Nashville sounds of yesteryear. Such local acts as **Carolyn Sills, Jack Grace, Alex Battles,** and **Monica (Lil' Mo) Passin** stand in for Patsy Cline, Johnny Cash, Hank Williams, and Loretta Lynn, respectively.

THE BELL HOUSE
149 7th St., between Second and Third Aves., Brooklyn. (718-643-6510)—Jan. 22: **Mumiy Troll.** You don't need to be able to read Cyrillic to understand this Russian band—a fluency in groovy post-punk and edgy guitar rock is all that's required. The foursome, based in Vladivostok and Moscow, fires off sparkling pop songs that keep its young chain-smoking fans dancing. Jan. 24: **Care Bears on Fire** are three teen-age Brooklyn girls who turn it up to eleven with their parents' approval. No newcomers to the all-ages scene, they've been strumming chords and crooning since before they were in middle school. Their début album, "I Stole Your Animal," came out in 2007. Jan. 26: **Duncan Sheik's** Broadway musical, "Spring Awakening," may have closed, but the brilliant singer-songwriter has a new studio album, "Whisper House," out now. He celebrates its release with a seated solo show here.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Jan. 21: The folksy harmonies and psychedelic experimentation of **Animal Collective.** Jan. 22: The local Russian-born singer-songwriter and piano player **Regina Spektor** has a style that can be folk, pop, or punk. She's risen from the downtown anti-folk scene to the national stage, and she's here celebrating the thirty-sixth anniversary of Roe v. Wade in a benefit for Planned Parenthood of New York City.

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (877-598-8694)—Jan. 23: **Mumiy Troll** (see The Bell House). Jan. 24: France, a country hardly known for producing proper rock bands, has become a source of some of the world's best electronic music. **M83,** from Antibes, follows in the tradition of Air, Cassius, and Daft Punk. The duo fluctuated between dreamy ambience and feral dissonance earlier this decade and has since embraced the sound and feel of the best of eighties pop. Its latest album, "Saturdays=Youth," is a full-color tribute to the heyday of John Hughes flicks.

GRAND BALLROOM
Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. (800-745-3000)—Jan. 20: **Animal Collective** (see the Bowery Ballroom).

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Jan. 22-25: The fierce and uncompromising guitarist and singer **Toshi Reagon** celebrates her birthday, backed by her band, Big Lovely. Her mother, **Bernice Johnson Reagon** (the founder of Sweet Honey in the Rock), joins her on the final night.

(LE) POISSON ROUGE
158 Bleecker St. (212-796-0741)—Jan. 24: The Portland-based art-school graduate and multi-instrumentalist Luke Wyland leads **Au,** an experimental pop duet rounded out by the drummer Dana Valatka. Wyland's unusual songs, played on keyboards, lap-steel guitar, and melodica, are built around repetitive, minimalist keyboard figures that evoke both Krautrock-era electronica and Steve Reich patterns. The melodic yearning of Wyland's vocals gives the songs a hint of ecstasy. With the

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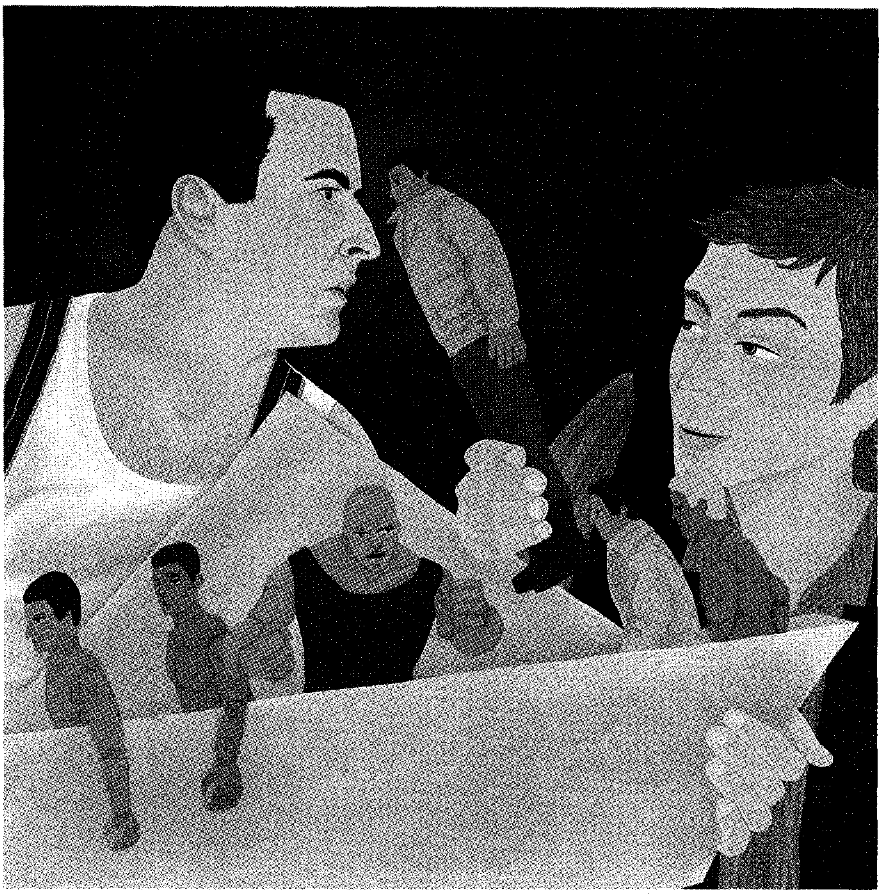
Brooklyn-based nine-piece collective **Stars Like Fleas,** who share an affinity for repetition. This nearly orchestra-sized group creates long songs that have moments of improvisation and often build to a quiet, hypnotic climax. Later that night: A product of the fallout of New York's fabled punk scene, **ESG** was formed by four sisters in the South Bronx, in 1978, when noisy guitar rock, dance music, and then-fledgling hip-hop were coming together in a fertile fusion. The sisters combined punk's do-it-yourself aesthetic with their shared love of funky rhythm, and their rudimentary, infectious beats became club staples and influenced bands like Luscious Jackson and the Beastie Boys.



Scotland's Visible Fictions presents "Jason and the Argonauts," at the New Victory.

DIVYA SRINIVASAN

UNION POOL

484 Union Ave., Brooklyn (718-609-0484)—Jan. 24: Sxip Shirey, like the mad impresario of an international punk circus, leads the Brooklyn-based **Luminescent Orchestrii** on resophonic guitar, with frequent recourse to melodeon, bullhorn harmonica, and various windup toys, bells, and whistles. The band's two fiddlers, Rima Fand and Sarah Alden, are as adept at Gypsy violin as they are at Appalachian folk raunch. Benji Fox-Rosen favors a pint-sized double-bass, and adds jazz and tango to the mix. Their influences include Doc Watson, Igor Stravinsky, the Dead Kennedys, and the Bulgarian Women's Choir. Just the crew to play your wedding, if you're a nice Bulgarian girl marrying into a freak show. Joining them to celebrate the release of their third CD, "Neptune's Daughter," are the percussionist Mathias Kunzli, the artsy human beat-box master Adam Matta, and the clarinettist Greg Squared. With the klezmer clarinettist Michael Winograd and Oren Marshall, on electric tuba, as the opening acts.

WEBSTER HALL

125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Jan. 24: **Devotchka,** a Denver-based chamber-rock group with an affinity for ethnic music, performs songs from its appealing new record, "How It Ends." Led by the singer, guitarist, and trumpeter Nick Urata, the quartet uses a wide array of instruments (sousaphone, accordion, bouzouki, theremin) to make a hybrid of rock and world music that's neither cursory nor voyeuristic. Urata's unaffected voice, which has a hint of Rocky Mountain loneliness in it, gives the group's sound roots, whether they're playing a raucous midway tune or a spaghetti-Western ballad. For this performance, the foursome will be augmented by acrobats, a string section, and mariachi horns.

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE

Jan. 24: A night of Puerto Rican *bomba* and *plena* courtesy of the Bronx's **Los Pleneros de la 21.** (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. For more information, call 212-545-7536.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL

59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Through Jan. 31: The vocalist **Steve Ross** performs "Too Late Now," "Gigi," "I'm Glad I'm Not Young Anymore," "Almost Like Being in Love," and other songs by the lyricist Alan Jay Lerner.

BIRDLAND

315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Jan. 21-22: **Monty Alexander,** a sparkplug of a mainstream pianist, is here with his trio. Jan. 23-24: Alexander fleshes out the group with exceptional accompanists, including the bassist **Drew Gress** and the drummers **Herlin Riley** and **Billy Hart.**

CAFÉ CARLYLE

Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—Jan. 20-31: **Christine Ebersole,** whose run on Broadway in "Grey Gardens" cemented her status as a titan of contemporary musical theatre, presents a new show.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA

Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Jan. 20-25: The pianist **Cyrus Chestnut** and his Let Freedom Swing band counts among its assets **Stacy Dillard,** a promising saxophonist swiftly becoming a steady presence on the scene.

FEINSTEIN'S AT LOEWS REGENCY

540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Jan. 20-Feb. 7: **Jane Monheit** continues to do what she does best: sing standards in a pleasing, lightly swinging manner.

JAZZ GALLERY

290 Hudson St., near Spring St. (212-242-1063)—Jan. 23: The saxophonist **Oliver Lake** has lately made having a big band a priority; this lineup (which finds the reedman **Marty Ehrlich** among its ranks) is sure to reflect the inside-outside sensibilities of Lake's own playing and writing. Jan. 24: **Tony Malaby,** one of the strongest tenor saxophonists of his generation, fronts a quartet that includes the whip-smart drummer **Nasheet Waits.**

JAZZ STANDARD

116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Jan. 21: **Noah Preminger,** a promising young saxophonist, is joined by a first-rate cadre of players, including the guitarist **Ben Monder** and the pianist **Frank Kimbrough.** Jan. 22-25: The master-and-student relationship between the veteran saxophonist **Lee Konitz** and the saxophone acolyte **Ohad Talmor** bears stimulating fruit. Konitz's big band benefits from Talmor's fulsome charts based on Konitz's own tunes and improvisations. The Mingus tribute bands are in rotation on Mondays.

(LE) POISSON ROUGE

158 Bleecker St. (212-796-0741)—Jan. 26-27: On a good night, the extravagantly virtuosic trumpeter **Arturo Sandoval** blows as if he wants to be heard all the way to his native Cuba.

SMALLS

183 W. 10th St. (212-252-5091)—Jan. 22: The swing and stride pianist **Ehud Asherie** performs duets with the trumpeter **Jon-Erik Kellso.** Jan. 23-24: The pianist **Jeb Patton** may be best known for his work with the Heath Brothers band; in his own trio, he gets matchless support from the drummer **Albert (Tootie) Heath.**

THE STONE

Avenue C at 2nd St. (No phone)—Jan. 23: A goading presence on the new-jazz scene for more than a decade, the trumpeter **Ralph Alessi** leads a quartet. (For more information, visit www.thestonenyc.com.)

VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Jan. 20-25: The pianist **Uri Caine** has his hand in a million imaginative projects, from evoking turn-of-the-century New York ghetto life to remolding classics by composers from Bach to Mahler. Compared with those grand doings, his compact trio may seem limited in ambition, but Caine can still be expected to shake things up. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Pierre Bonnard: The Late Interiors."** Opens Jan. 27. ♦ **"Beyond Babylon: Art, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Second Millennium B.C."** Through March 15. ♦ **"Raphael to Renoir: Drawings from the Collection of Jean Bonna."** Opens Jan. 21. ♦ **"The Philippe de Montebello Years: Curators Celebrate Three Decades of Acquisitions."** Through Feb. 1. ♦ **"Art and Love in Renaissance Italy."** Through Feb. 16. ♦ **"Raqib Shaw."** Through March 1. ♦ **"Calder Jewelry."** Through March 1. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave."** Through Feb. 16. ♦ **"Pipilotti Rist: Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters)."** Through Feb. 2. ♦ **"Vik Muniz: Rebus."** Through Feb. 23. ♦ **"Focus: Sol LeWitt."** Through June 29. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"The Thannhauser Collection."** Ongoing. ♦ **"Kandinsky and**

Expressionist Painting Before World War I." Ongoing. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—"**William Eggleston: Democratic Camera, Photographs and Video, 1961-2008.**" Through Jan. 25. ♦ "**Alexander Calder: The Paris Years, 1926-1933.**" Through Feb. 15. ♦ "**Alex Bag.**" Through April 30. ♦ "**Elad Lassry: Three Films.**" Opens Jan. 22. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—"**The Black List Project: Timothy Greenfield-Sanders and Elvis Mitchell.**" Through March 29. ♦ "**Burning Down the House: Building a Feminist Art Collection.**" Through April 5. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—"**Climate Change: The Threat to Life and a New Energy Future.**" Through Aug. 16. ♦ "**The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter.**" Through May 25. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—"**Edward Steichen: In High Fashion.**" Through May 3. ♦ "**Weird Beauty: Fashion Photography Now.**" Through May 3. ♦ "**This Is Not a Fashion Photograph.**" Through May 3. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—"**On the Money: Cartoons for *The New Yorker*.**" Opens Jan. 23. ♦ "**The Thaw Collection of Master Drawings: Acquisitions Since 2002.**" Opens Jan. 23. ♦ "**Protecting the Word: Bookbindings of the Morgan.**" Through March 29. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—"**Eudora Welty in New York: Photographs of the Early 1930s.**" Through Feb. 16. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

QUEENS MUSEUM OF ART
Flushing Meadows–Corona Park (718-592-9700)—"**Queens International 4.**" Opens Jan. 24. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 5.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

RICHARD ALDRICH
Aldrich would win this year's M.H.B.I. (Mary Heilmann Blithe Informalist) award, if there were one. He's a fey, insolent whiz at tweaking conventions of painting: cutting away canvas to reveal stretchers, attaching curtains with chopsticks, incorporating postcards of Whistler portraits, rendering the word "coward" with a huge "C" in strips of torn shirt, or punctuating fast, loose brushwork with glued-on almonds. When Aldrich simply, abstractly paints, he's an infectious daubster, with sensitivity to burn. One picture credibly—and, thereby, somehow scandalously—pastiches mid-period Guston, in massy grays. This is art with tongue rammed perilously far in cheek, but so far, so good. Through Feb. 28. (Bortolami, 510 W. 25th St. 212-727-2050.)

NOBUYOSHI ARAKI
Although this prolific Japanese photographer is best known for his fetish-driven erotica, his output has always been much more various. The some two hundred and fifty pictures exhibited here, many for the first time, were made early in Araki's career, in the nineteen-sixties, when he was working at an ad agency during the day and shooting surreptitiously on the subway on his way to work and on the streets of the Ginza during his lunch break. Printed in high-contrast black-and-white and pinned directly to the wall, the Ginza photographs are the heart of the show: quick, glancing takes that add up to an engrossing, kaleidoscopic picture of urban life. Through Feb. 7. (Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663.)

DON BACHARDY
When he was eighteen, Bachardy met Christopher Isherwood, who was then forty-eight. Their relationship lasted more than three decades, until Isherwood died, of prostate cancer, in 1986. The drawings here form a haunting portrait of the writer's final year. Bachardy doesn't idealize his lover; instead, with an expressive emotionalism worthy of Egon Schiele and brushstrokes as delicate as Chinese calligraphy, he documents Isherwood's decline, from upright and alert to reclining and catatonic. The drawings are provocative—shocking, really, in their near-clinical intimacy—but also deeply moving. Through Feb. 7. (Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727.)

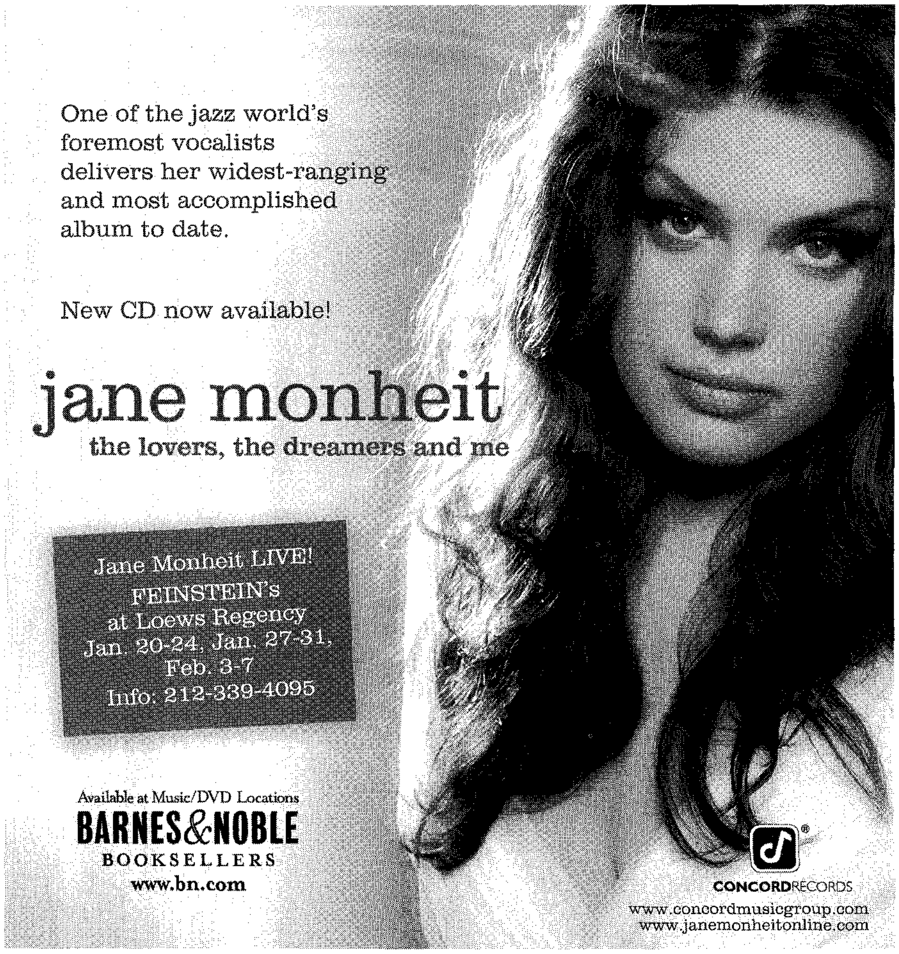
ROBERT GOBER / FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES
High on a wall in the gallery's big main room is one of Gober's barred windows with a trompe-l'oeil blue sky illuminated behind it. The opposite wall is inset, at head level, with a less familiar Gonzalez-Torres: two abutted round mirrors, side by side, perhaps for self-assessment by pairs of lovers. (If you're alone, the wasted mirror might seem a gloomy rebuke.) That's the whole show, leaving lots of empty space to luxuriate in, amid the visual clamors of a Chelsea afternoon. How much do you cherish the impeccable soulfulnesses of Gober and Gonzalez-Torres? You may be moved to gauge that. Through Jan. 31. (Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000.)

TEUN HOCKS
As the star, or schlub, of his photographs and videos, this Dutch artist portrays a hapless, Chaplinesque Everyman, thwarted at every turn but ever resilient. (His appearance here is especially appropriate: forced by a fire to relocate, the gallery is in temporary quarters.) In one video, he crawls out of a baseboard mousehole, only to dart back again and again when confronted with the looming shadow of a cat. The hand-painted photographs are more melancholy and surreal: Beckett joins Magritte in the wasteland. Hocks sets off with a bandanna-wrapped hobo sack as big as Sisyphus's rock, and never looks back. Through Feb. 14. (P.P.O.W, 511 W. 25th St. 212-647-1044.)

FAIRFIELD PORTER / ANDREW FORGE
Drawings, mostly landscapes, by the great painter-critic Porter and abstract watercolors by the pretty good painter-critic Forge stir thoughts about intellectual ambition surrendering to sensuous experience. Porter's realism exalts a philosophical being-in-the-world. His best drawings are flattened surroundings, with some odd contours that suggest boundaries of tacit, sumptuous tone and color. (As a bonus, there's a gawky sketch of Frank O'Hara naked, but for boots, from a session in 1954 that also produced a famous image, of the same, by Larry Rivers.) Forge's assiduous accumulations of translucent strokes and dots of tender color are like devotional appeals to a muse who is flattered but unaroused. Through Jan. 31. (Cuningham, 541 W. 25th St. 212-242-2772.)

FRED SANDBACK
Do not miss what is perhaps the most beautiful show to date of the late minimalist's space-dramatizing coups in stretched filament (usually fuzzy acrylic yarn). Sandback's range extends from stark early demonstrations of how limned edges can evoke invisible yet solid planes to the complex, sensationally lovely structuring of rigorous geometry and soft color, at monumental scale. A viewer's attention may be drawn chiefly to what isn't there—to space itself, activated by one's movement through it—and, though you could pocket the entire exhibition in a pair of cargo pants, with room to spare for house keys, the payoff in aesthetic satisfaction leaves nothing to be desired. Through Feb. 14. (Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070.)

JOSEF SCHULZ
The super-glossy computer-manipulated work in this Polish-born, Düsseldorf-trained photographer's



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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
PANDORA, EXPLORER

Free music on the Web comes in many flavors—podcasts, MP3s posted on blogs, and sites that stream audio. The last group most resembles the radio stations of old, but even a new traditionalist will be confused by the welter of options. Should you use Blip.fm? Imeem? Pandora works on a principle similar to iTunes Genius, which it predated by a few years, and on both its desktop version and the far superior iPhone application, it's pretty intuitive. Start with a band or a song: are you in the mood to listen to the Carter Family and similar music, or to the many descendants of "Planet Rock"? I entered Public Image Ltd.: Pandora selected the song "Fishing," and, in quick succession, gave me Bauhaus and the Ramones. But good d.j.s combine predictability and risk, and Pandora mostly plays it safe. And while you can nix songs that don't appeal to you, that function is more scythe than scalpel: say no to the Cure twice, and Pandora bans them from your custom station forever. Maybe they should do a little more thinking inside the box.

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

American début was made over the past six years, but it already feels a little retro. Schulz begins with photographs of office buildings, elevated expressways, and big-box stores, then strips the structures of all signs of age or individuality. Not only are there are no logos on the buildings in these huge color prints, there are no doors or windows. Schulz's pictures of sites reduced to abstractions—big, dumb sculptures in a sanitized landscape—might suggest an ominously faceless future if they didn't look so much like relics of the digital-photography boom of the nineties. Through Jan. 31. (Milo, 525 W. 25th St. 212-414-0370.)

SANDRA VÁSQUEZ DE LA HORRA
The Chilean artist's surrealistic, cannily crude wax-coated pencil drawings split differences between Goyaesque phantasmagoria and op-ed illustration. Themes of sexual abjection, political violence, and death are advanced with sardonic, ambiguous zeal—relishing as much as deploring the depicted horrors. The use of wax gives the drawings, which often incorporate titles or captions, arresting physical density, but Vásquez de la Horra's imaginative project gains little in being displayed that it couldn't achieve in reproduction or, for that matter, in poetic paraphrase. How she thinks intrigues more strongly than what she makes. Through Jan. 31. (Nolan, 527 W. 29th St. 212-925-6190.)

LISA YOUNG
Absurd taxonomies and accidental beauty abound in Young's solo début in New York, which was organized by *Cabinet* magazine. It opens with a laptop computer that generates concrete poetry based on the grammar of fortune cookies. Four hundred and eighteen sheep figurines, ranging in size from tiny to small, graze in a tidy grid on a nearby pedestal. Video footage of televised sports—a compilation of golf balls soaring through blue skies, four performances of one routine by the figure skater Michelle Kwan—underscore the mood of sublime absurdity. Through Jan. 24. (Cue Art Foundation, 511 W. 25th St. 212-206-3583.)

Short List

ALLORA & CALZADILLA: Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300. Opens Jan. 23. **JANET BIGGS:** Oliver, 513 W. 26th St. 212-929-5949. Through Feb. 7. **MONA HATOUM:** Alexander and Bonin, 132 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 212-357-7474. Through Feb. 21. **MARY HEILMANN:** 303 Gallery, 547 W. 21st St. 212-255-1121. Through Feb. 21. **ON KAWARA:** Zwirner, 519 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through Feb. 14. **IMI KNOEBEL:** Boone, 541 W. 24th St. 212-752-2929. Through Feb. 14. **CHARLES LONG:** Bonakdar, 521 W. 21st St. 212-414-4144. Through Feb. 21. **PIERO MANZONI:** Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111. Opens Jan. 24. **SARA GREENBERGER RAFFERTY:** The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. Through March 7. **PETER ROSTOVSKY:** Meltzer, 525-531 W. 26th St. 212-727-9330. Through Feb. 14. **AMY SILLMAN:** Sikkema Jenkins & Co., 530 W. 22nd St. 212-929-2262. Through Feb. 21. **"EVERY REVOLUTION IS A ROLL OF THE DICE":** Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105. Through Feb. 7. **"SHORT CIRCUITS":** Blum, 526 W. 29th St. 212-244-6055. Opens Jan. 24.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

MARTIN PARR
This exhibition's title, "Parr-O-Rama," leads us to expect a celebration of the fun-house humor that is all some people know of the British photographer's work. But while the show does feature large-scale closeups of a pink poodle, an English breakfast, and a plate of pig-shaped petits fours, it also gives a much wider view of his busy career. Although Parr has photographed all over the world, England remains the subject of his most affectionate and wickedly satirical work. His pictures of the British at leisure may not always be subtle, but the best of them (including many of the images gathered here) are as offhandedly incisive as snapshots of one's immediate family. Through Jan. 31. (Borden, 560 Broadway, at Prince St. 212-431-0166.)

R. H. QUAYTMAN
Quaytman's show is a mise en abyme. Just inside the entrance, viewers encounter three wall paintings of a "scintillating grid," an optical illusion created by superimposing white dots at the intersections of gray lines on a black background so that spots seem to rapidly pulsate at random. Other works play with depictions of illumination, including an abstract, Op-ish painting lit by an actual lamp. Flipping back and forth between images and their mechanical and manual reproductions—one of the visual koans of contemporary art—Quaytman has found a way to make complex ideas look simple and vice versa. Through Feb. 1. (Abreu, 36 Orchard St. 212-995-1774.)

Short List

JOSÉ LEÓN CERRILLO: Dispatch, 127 Henry St. 212-227-2783. Through Jan. 31. **PETER DOIG:** Brown, 620 Greenwich St. 212-627-5258. Through Feb. 21. **JASON FOX:** Blum, 9 Wooster St. 212-343-0441. Through March 7. **MATT JOHNSON:** Taxter & Spengemann, 123 E. 12th St. 212-924-0212. Through Feb. 14. **PAM LINS:** Uffner, 47 Orchard St. 212-274-0064. Through Feb. 8. **SETH PRICE:** Spaulings, 165 East Broadway. 212-477-5006. Opens Jan. 22. **ERIK VAN LIESHOUT:** Maccarone, 630 Greenwich St. 212-431-4977. Through Feb. 21.

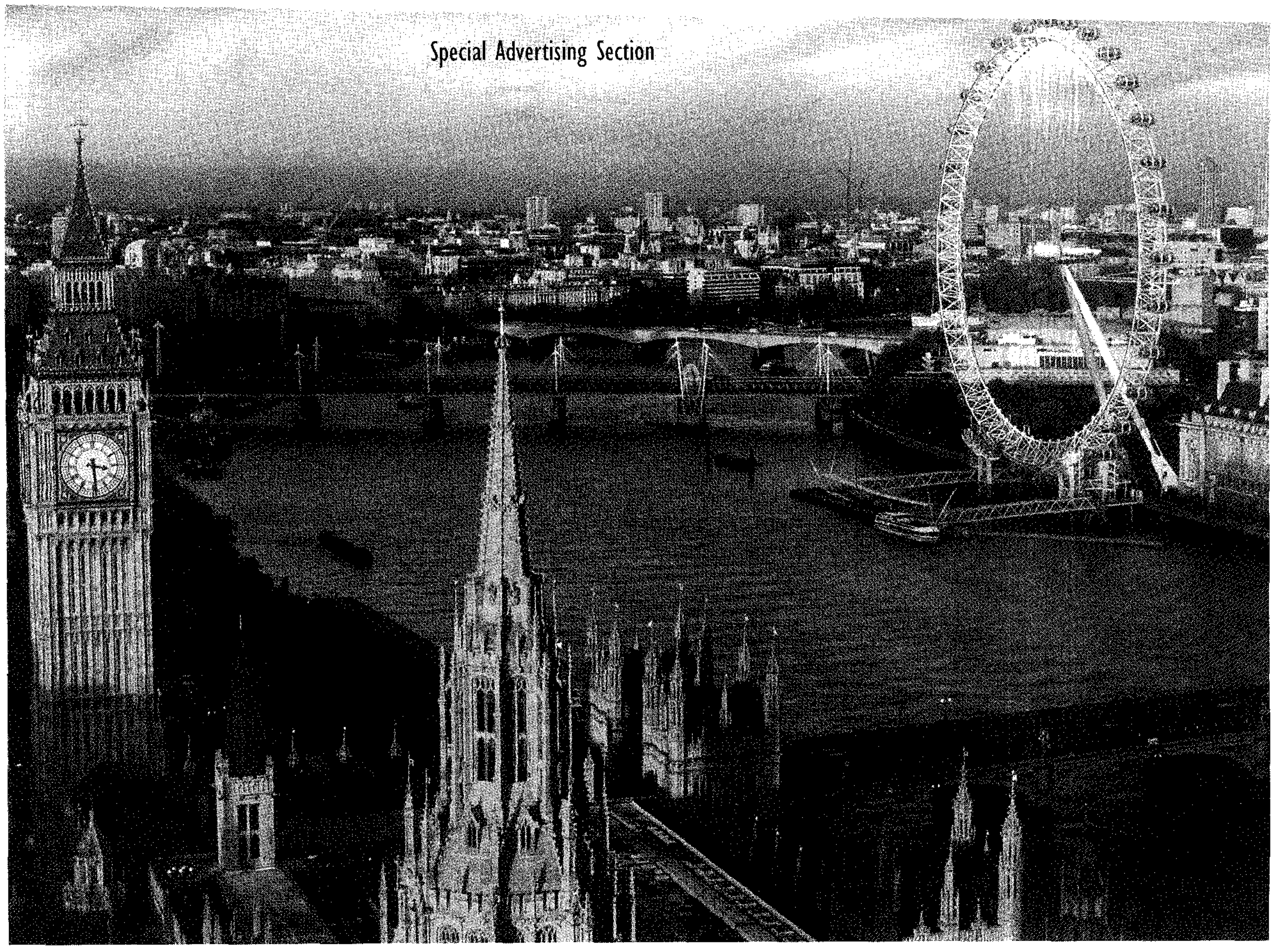
DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
The first of the season's two new works will be revealed this week, as part of the "New Combinations: A Tribute to Nureyev" evening. Nureyev's foundation has partnered with N.Y.C.B. to support commissions from young choreographers—in this case, the British-born Douglas Lee, a Royal Ballet School graduate who currently dances with Stuttgart Ballet. Lee's "Lifecasting," set to music by Steve Reich and the Japanese sound artist Ryoji Ikeda, will be performed alongside the intensely intimate pas de deux from Christopher Wheeldon's "After the Rain," Balanchine's glorious "Theme and Variations," and "La Stravaganza," a dark, theatrical ballet by the French modernist Angelin Preljocaj. ♦ Jan. 21 at 7:30 and Jan. 24 at 2: "Interplay," "The Cage," "Four Bagatelles," and "I'm Old Fashioned." ♦ Jan. 22 at 8 and Jan. 25 at 3 (Nureyev tribute): "La Stravaganza," "After the Rain" (pas de deux), "Lifecasting," and "Theme and Variations." ♦ Jan. 23-24 at 8: "Chiaroscuro," "Papillons," "Concerto DSCH," and "Brahms-Schoenberg Quartet." ♦ Jan. 27 at 7:30: "Monumentum pro Gesualdo," "Movements for Piano and Orchestra," "Dances at a Gathering," and "Stars and Stripes." (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Through March 1.)

MIAMI CITY BALLET
The company, led by the former New York City Ballet star Edward Villella, will finally set foot on the island of Manhattan for its first City Center season. Widely considered to be among the most vivid interpreters of Balanchine's choreography, the ensemble, in two programs, offers a range of Balanchine, from the glittering "Symphony in C" to the bucolic and searching "Square Dance," as well as "Rubies," a winking, jazzy ode to American energy. The exception is Twyla Tharp's nineteen-eighties tour de force "In the Upper Room," set to a driving score by Philip Glass. ♦ Jan. 21 and Jan. 23 at 8 and Jan. 24 at 2: "Symphony in Three Movements," "La Valse," and "In the Upper Room." ♦ Jan. 22 and Jan. 24 at 8 and Jan. 25 at 3: "Square Dance," "Rubies," and "Symphony in C." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

ELISA MONTE DANCE
Jeffery Broussard & the Creole Cowboys supply the heat and stomp, live, for the veteran choreographer's latest creation, "Zydeco, Zaré," a visceral rendering of a humid Louisianan Creole party. Kevin Keller's sparer, more ruminative score for "Arrow's Path" inspires an intimate quintet, and the program fills out with last year's straining "Slope of Enlightenment" and "Audentity," a perpetual-motion piece from 1984. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th

DANIELA SCHÜTT POZZO



TOP, VIEW OF THE THAMES: COURTESY OF VISIT LONDON

LONDON: A World of Value

AS ETERNALLY NEW as it is historically rich, London is a timeless destination whose time has come. In 2009, this stunning capital of fashion and culture offers a world of possibilities and one of the world's best travel buys. With a much more favorable exchange rate ($1.45: £1 at press time), a trip to London will cost twenty-five per cent less than it did this time last year, so there's no need to compromise on your ideal of an elegant and enriching holiday.

The city's diverse neighborhoods each offer their own distinctive personality. Chic west London is home to vintage fashions and antiques at **Portobello Market** as well as at a newly opened mall, **Westfield,** where shoppers are afforded both designer and less expensive brands. The new **Saatchi Gallery** pushes the boundaries of art and innovation, and the swinging **Chelsea** district, where it's located, pulses with creative energy. There's cutting-edge style at **Spitalfields Market** and contemporary art at the newly expanded **Whitechapel Gallery.** Great shopping abounds on **Oxford and Regent streets,** and there's extraordinary dining in the city's **forty-five Michelin-starred restaurants**.

NEW IN 2009

London will be hosting a number of fabulous celebrations this year. Among them, the 500th anniversary of Henry VIII's accession to the throne will be marked with unique exhibits at two historical sites most associated with the mighty monarch—**Hampton Court Palace** and the **Tower of London**—and events at the **British Library** and other of the city's venues.

Darwin 200 is a series of events celebrating Charles Darwin's ideas and their impact taking place around his 200th birthday on February 12th. The 250th anniversary of Kew Gardens will include a **Tropical Extravaganza** of orchids, bromeliads, and anthuriums, as well as a special exhibition of native British flowers and the much-lauded spring celebration featuring a spectacular crocus carpet. In March, the prestigious **Selfridges** department store will mark its 100th birthday with a retrospective and limited edition memorabilia.

> "With a much more favorable exchange rate, a trip to London will cost twenty-five per cent less than it did this time last year."

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In a city as beloved for its hospitality as it is for its shopping, travelers are invited to check into two newly renovated legendary hotels: the **Savoy,** in the heart of the West End, reopening in May, and the sleek new four-star **Radisson Edwardian Marlborough Hotel** on Bloomsbury Street, just steps from the British Museum and a short stroll to Covent Garden.

Special events run the gamut from pop music to Picasso. From February 21st to March 22nd, the **Old Truman Brewery** presents **"Simply Madonna,"** exhibiting the world's largest private collection of the entertainer's film and stage costumes. **"Picasso: Challenging the Past"** runs at the **National Gallery** from February 25th to June 7th, and includes sixty of the artist's major works. At the **Tate Modern** from October 1st through January 17th, 2010, **"Sold Out"** will propose a radical rereading of Pop Art and its legacy.

Not-to-be-missed new plays include **"Priscilla Queen of the Desert: The Musical,"** opening on March 23rd at the **Palace Theatre; "Calendar Girls,"** Tim Firth's stage adaptation of the hit film, running from April 4th to September 19th at the **Noël Coward Theatre; "A Doll's House"** starring Gillian Anderson, at the **Donmar Warehouse,** from May 19th to July 18th; and Whoopi Goldberg's **"Sister Act,"** opening at the **London Palladium** on June 2nd, with previews starting May 7th.

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St. 212-242-0800. Jan. 21 at 7:30, Jan. 22-23 at 8, Jan. 24 at 2 and 8, and Jan. 25 at 2 and 7:30.)

"LAURIE & FRIENDS"
At BAM, the legendary performance artist Laurie Anderson—whose collaboration with Trisha Brown "O Zlozony/O Composite" will be seen here later this spring—is hosting a one-night show that takes its inspiration from the arrival of a new year and a new political landscape. Anderson has asked a few of her favorite acts, including the cabaret performer Bree Benton, the folk rockers Brightblack Morning Light, and the downtown dance queen Sarah Michelson, to create and perform works on "the theme of beginning." As usual, Michelson is mum about the details of her new dance piece, but if the past is any indication, it should be a densely layered and bewitching affair. (30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Jan. 21 at 8.)

DELIRIOUS DANCES
In "Elephant Dreams," Edisa Weeks cleverly joins the stories of two youngsters mocked for their physical eccentricities—the Elephant Man and Dumbo. Setting the tales in conformity-conscious nineteen-fifties America, Weeks uses the disproportionate to question normality. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. Jan. 23-24 at 8 and Jan. 25 at 3.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
The Met's main offering this month is of Mark Morris's enchanting 2007 production of Gluck's **"Orfeo ed Euridice,"** a spare, compact, and firmly lyrical work from the early classical era that came as a correction after several decades of florid, Handelian entertainments. Morris's choreography is interspersed with performances by a trio of wonderful singers: Danielle de Niese, Heidi Grant Murphy, and the extraordinary Stephanie Blythe; James Levine conducts. (Jan. 24 at 1.) ♦ The company's Otto Schenk production of **"Rigoletto,"** sumptuously faithful to its Renaissance setting, makes its return this week, with Aleksandra Kurzak, Giuseppe Filianoti, and Željko Lučić in the leading roles; Riccardo Frizza. (Jan. 24 and Jan. 27 at 8.) ♦ Mary Zimmerman's daring 2007 production of **"Lucia di Lammermoor,"** while undeniably theatrical, upset a number of traditionalists used to the Met's formerly conservative staging. For its first revival, the management is offering a gilt-edged cast, highlighted by the reunion of opera's leading glamour couple: Anna Netrebko and Rolando Villazón. Also with Mariusz Kwiecien and Ildar Abdrazakov; Marco Armiliato. (Jan. 26 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

THREE OPERAS BY ROBERT ASHLEY
For four decades, Ashley has stood as the quiet radical of American opera, creating evocative

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TABLES FOR TWO
DIRT CANDY

430 E. 9th St. (212-228-7732)—The new vegetarian restaurant Dirt Candy (not to be confused with the X-rated movie "Dirty Candy") deserves a better name. According to the owner and chef, Amanda Cohen, vegetables are like candy from the dirt. Maybe, but there is nothing earthy about her nine-table East Village restaurant. The translucent white tabletops, the glass-panelled walls, the greenish lighting, and, most of all, the food evoke some utopian future where the people have renounced not just meat but also soil, in favor of brightly colored, hydroponically grown produce.

Cohen is not a vegetarian (she eats seafood), but she is vegetable-mad. She has a problem with most vegetarian restaurants, which she says have a politicized, uncreative approach. She likes cream and butter and deep-frying, and is big on drizzling and tall garnishes. Many of her dishes are so earnest in their embrace of a single ingredient that you find yourself stopping to really think about that vegetable, as if for the first time. This is true of the portobello mousse, a dense, comforting cube topped with a pile of grilled mushroom slices. But if the candy-colored carrot risotto reminds you just how sweet and rich carrots can be, it can be exhausting for the same reason. Some of the other dishes suffer from the opposite problem. A pappardelle with cauliflower is unduly complicated by the addition of raisins and dehydrated-pine-nut wafers, which taste no better than they sound. The wine selections are strange—although thankfully cheap—with stranger descriptions. (According to the wine list, an Orzada from Chile is "super juicy" with "an absurdly spicy finish," while on the restaurant's blog, it's "what a Viking ship would taste like if you could drink it.")

In another goof, Cohen won the enmity of various online vegetarians when she called some of her clientele "weirdos" in an interview last month. (As she explained later to the Web site Gothamist, the restaurant was getting more than its share of "people with allergies and people who have their funny diet things like 'Oh, I'm only eating white food today!'" and "'I'm on a liquid diet. . . . Can you blend it for me?'") But the other night, at least, a mixed crowd of vegetarians and non-vegetarians seemed content. The guy at the next table, who was wearing a ski hat with a PETA logo, grew briefly critical ("It's not really huge portions," he said), but soon enough returned to his conversation, which concerned an acquaintance named Antler. He paused, and corrected himself: "No, not Antler, Elka." (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays for dinner. Entrées $16-$18.)

—*Kate Julian*

"FRESH TRACKS"
Among the crop of emerging choreographers in this year's installment of Dance Theatre Workshop's long-standing ones-to-watch series, the most familiar to New York audiences is Hilary Clark, known for her intelligent performances with Tere O'Connor Dance. The others include the Iranian-American Sahar Javedani, whose work draws on her Persian heritage, and Jen Rosenblit, from rural Maine, whose BottomHeavy Productions is versed in country things. (219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Jan. 22 and Jan. 24 at 7:30 and Jan. 23 at 7:30 and 10.)

TARA O'CON / THE LIVING LABORATORY
ENRICO D. WEY
For her part of a Danspace Project double bill of débuts, the young O'Con adapts her "Walk It Once," whose grotesque struggles with physical boundaries were conceived for the concrete floor of the Chocolate Factory, to the wooden resonances of St. Mark's Church. Wey, who's also an accomplished and inventive puppeteer, dissects suburbia on a plastic lawn in "Standard Gravity, Part 2B." (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. Jan. 22-24 at 8:30.)

JESSIE WENDER

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works in which a team of trusted singer-reciters (including Thomas Buckner and Joan La Barbara) intone the extraordinary words of ordinary people—senior citizens, homeless guys—as Ashley weaves a garland of electroacoustic sound around them. Three shows run in repertory this week. Jan. 20-21 and Jan. 24 at 8: **"Made Out of Concrete."** ♦ Jan. 22 and Jan. 25 at 8: **"Dust."** ♦ Jan. 23 at 8: **"Celestial Excursions,"** featuring the performance artist Joan Jonas. (La Mama Annex, 74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710. For more information, see www.lamama.org. These are the final performances.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
The elegant and commanding maestro Riccardo Muti is not neglecting the two-hundredth anniversary of the death of Haydn, the musical embodiment of Enlightenment ideals. His upcoming concerts with the Philharmonic find him conducting not only the gracious Symphony No. 89 in F Major but also three arias from the composer's final opera, "L'Anima del Filosofo, ossia Orfeo ed Euridice" (with the expressive baritone Thomas Quasthoff). Brahms's Serenade No. 1 in D Major closes the program. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Jan. 22 and Jan. 27 at 7:30 and Jan. 24 at 8.)

BUDAPEST FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA
Iván Fischer has made this jewel of an ensemble into what is arguably the finest symphony orchestra in Eastern Europe. In the first concert of Carnegie Hall's "Celebrating Hungary" series, a clutch of folk-themed works by Brahms and Liszt (the Hungarian Rhapsody No. 3) is bookended by performances of authentic Gypsy music (featuring the violinists József Lendvay, Jr., and Sr.) and by what should be a formidable rendition of Brahms's Symphony No. 1 in C Minor. (212-247-7800. Jan. 24 at 8.)

THE MET ORCHESTRA
After Haydn, 2009's other anniversary boy is Mendelssohn, who was born in the same year that the older composer died. The immortal high spirits of his "Italian" Symphony will crown this concert by James Levine and his magnificent ensemble, preceded by music by Mozart (the concert aria "Ch'io mi scordi di te," with Joyce DiDonato), Rossini, and that Met Orchestra staple, Charles Wuorinen (the world première of "Time Regained," with the pianist Peter Serkin). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Jan. 25 at 3.)

AMERICAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
In one of Leon Botstein's most interesting concerts of the season, he conducts his group in music from "the other Germany"—East Germany, that is. Among the works having their U.S. premières are pieces by Hanns Eisler, Paul Dessau ("In Memoriam Bertolt Brecht"), and Rudolf Wagner-Régeny, all created in an era of totalitarian rule. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500. Jan. 25 at 3.)

RECITALS

MARILYN HORNE FOUNDATION CONCERTS
"The Song Continues," the great mezzo-soprano's annual series of concerts and master classes at Carnegie Hall, exists to give training and exposure to talented young singers. In one of its recital events, Myra Huang and Jerome Tan will accompany the soprano Susanna Phillips and the tenor Alek Shrader in songs by Brahms, Liszt (the very obscure "Drei Lieder aus William Tell"), Messiaen (selections from Book I of "Poèmes pour Mi"), and Britten. (Weill Recital Hall. 212-247-7800. Jan. 21 at 5:30. For full schedule, see www.carnegiehall.com.)

SCOTT JOHNSON AND MARK DANCIGERS: "NEW AND USED GUITARS"
Roulette's clean, well-lighted space will resound with the electric-guitar wails of Johnson, an icon of rock-classical fusion, who will collaborate with his up-and-coming colleague in new works by both composers; such new-music stalwarts as the pianist Stephen Gosling and the percussionist David Cossin are along for the ride. (20 Greene St. 212-219-8242. Jan. 21 at 8:30.)

The mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato sings at Carnegie Hall.

FRANCESCO CARROZZINI

STRADIVARI QUARTET
The superb young Swiss string quartet—all playing instruments made by their namesake—make their American début at the Metropolitan Museum, performing three quartets by Beethoven (including Op. 131 in C-Sharp Minor). (Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 212-570-3949. Jan. 22 at 8.)

LES TALENS LYRIQUES
The exciting mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato is the special guest of the renowned French Baroque ensemble, led by the harpsichordist Christophe Rousset. Their program, all Handel, features arias from "Teseo," "Hercules," "Ariodante," and "Serse." (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Jan. 23 at 7:30.)

MIRÓ QUARTET
The next concert by this radiant ensemble, at the front rank of a new generation of string quartets, has an American theme: classics by Ives (the String Quartet No. 1) and Dvořák (the Quartet No. 12, "American"), along with a new work by Kevin Puts. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Jan. 23 at 7:30.)

JUILLIARD "FOCUS!" FESTIVAL
This year, the wheel spins and lands on California, whose cornucopia of composers will be celebrated by Joel Sachs's annual festival, featuring the New Juilliard Ensemble (among other groups). The first concert includes music from the past and present by such composers as Henry Cowell, Robert Erickson, and John Adams ("Son of Chamber Symphony"). (Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, Juilliard School. Jan. 23 at 8. For full schedule, see www.juilliard.edu; for information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-769-7406.)

BARGEMUSIC
Brooklyn's floating chamber-music series offers an exceptionally interesting weekend of American music; it begins with Joshua Gordon and Randall Hodgkinson, an insightful and impassioned cello-piano duo, performing a concert in celebration of Elliott Carter's centenary, featuring the Sonata for Cello and Piano and the Figment No. 2, "Remembering Mr. Ives," along with music by Charles Ives himself and by a comparative youngster, Tod Machover. (Fulton Ferry Landing. 718-624-2083. Jan. 23 at 8. For full schedule, see www.bargemusic.org.)

MILLER THEATRE
George Steel is moving to City Opera, but his Miller programming lives on. The next concert celebrates the ninetieth birthday of the distinguished modernist Leon Kirchner, who will be on hand to enjoy performances of his works (including the "Sonata Concertante" and "Flutings for Paula") by such musicians as the flutist Paula Robison and the pianist Jeremy Denk. (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. Jan. 24 at 8.)

"MUSIC BEFORE 1800" SERIES: REBEL
This fine New York band fully deserves a place in a concert series known for importing first-rate early-music groups from abroad. Its concert, entitled "Al Santo Sepolcro," features works by Vivaldi, Biber, Pergolesi, Telemann, and Charpentier. (Corpus Christi Church, 529 W. 121st St. 212-666-9266. Jan. 25 at 4.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
The Society's artists pair music by two very different masters, Haydn (featuring the String Quartet in F Minor, Op. 20, No. 5) and Schumann (including the Piano Quartet), in a program at the New York Society for Ethical Culture; among the performers are the pianist André-Michel Schub and the Escher String Quartet. (2 W. 64th St. 212-875-5788. Jan. 25 at 5 and Jan. 27 at 7:30.)

"ROBY LAKATOS AND FRIENDS"
Lakatos, the uncontested king of Gypsy violinists, joins some valued colleagues for another exciting event in Carnegie Hall's Hungarian festival, an evening of folk and contemporary music at Stern Auditorium. (212-247-7800. Jan. 27 at 8.)

MOVIES OPENING

CALIFORNIA DREAMIN'
A comic drama, directed by Cristian Nemescu, about a group of U.S. Marines who get stuck in a small town in Romania. In Romanian and English. Opening Jan. 23. (IFC Center.)

DONKEY PUNCH
Oliver Blackburn directed this thriller, about three British women whose vacation in Spain turns deadly. Opening Jan. 23. (Cinema Village.)

INKHEART
A fantasy, directed by Iain Softley, about a man who must enter the imaginary world of books with his daughter in order to rescue her mother. Starring Eliza Bennett and Brendan Fraser. Opening Jan. 23. (In wide release.)

KILLSHOT
In this thriller, directed by John Madden, Mickey Rourke and Joseph Gordon-Levitt star as killers targeting a couple in a witness-protection program. Opening Jan. 23. (In wide release.)

THE LODGER
A remake of the film by Alfred Hitchcock, about the pursuit of a serial killer. Directed by David Ondaatje; starring Alfred Molina and Hope Davis. Opening Jan. 23. (Quad Cinema.)

OF TIME AND THE CITY
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Jan. 21. (Film Forum.)

NOW PLAYING

CHE
Released in two parts, Steven Soderbergh's new film concentrates on two defining episodes from the life of Che Guevara (Benicio Del Toro). First comes his arrival in Cuba in 1956, and the rebel campaign that gathered force across the island and took the town of Santa Clara. (The action pulls up short of the crowning triumph, Che's entry into Havana: Soderbergh is both stirred by the cause and suspicious of idolatrous thrills.) The second movie jumps to the mid-nineteen-sixties, and Che's efforts to spark a revolutionary movement in Bolivia; a far more sparse and desperate affair, with our hero—if that is what he is, by now—finally cornered and killed in the most sordid of circumstances. The screenwriters, Peter Buchman and Benjamin A. van der Veen, pepper this pair of stories with flashes back to an early meeting with Castro, and forward to a later visit to New York, where Che addressed the United Nations—shot in black-and-white, as if America were another world entirely. Del Toro's performance, with its rare smiles and hints of merciless discipline, is as guarded as the film itself, which somehow, for all its rigorous attention to detail, evokes a sense of flatness and inconsequence. Fans and mythologists of Che will raise only a half-cheer; his detractors will wonder what happened to the executions carried out under his name after the revolution, or his fumbled attempts to run the Cuban economy. In Spanish and English.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 1/19/09.) (In wide release.)

CHERRY BLOSSOMS
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Sunshine Cinema.)

THE CURIOUS CASE OF BENJAMIN BUTTON
A child is born in New Orleans in 1918 with the features and internal organs of an old man; then, as time passes, his age declines until he goes through late middle age, middle age, youth, and so on, back toward infancy and death. This science-fiction reverse-aging conceit, from an early F. Scott Fitzgerald story, has been rendered by the writer Eric Roth and the director David Fincher with a fanatical literalness that occasionally touches on the uncanny but often feels laborious and even pedantic. As Benjamin becomes younger, he turns into the handsome, fortyish Brad Pitt, and he has an affair with a vibrant, normally aging dancer (Cate Blanchett). They meet in the middle, so to speak, but the relationship is odd, since, instead of the fervent memories of youth, Benjamin has only the relief that he is no longer a crotchety old man. He's bland; he's Brad Pitt. There is much else, about New Orleans, the sea, and many other things, but the movie is an attenuated folly.—*David Denby* (In wide release.)

DEFIANCE
In the fall of 1941, in Nazi-occupied Belarus (just east of Poland), where Jews were being executed by the thousands, four brothers from a large farming family named Bielski went into the forest along with a few other people determined to survive. Eventually, twelve hundred Jews seeped out of the ghettos and joined the Bielski Otriad (Detachment). Some threw in their lot with Soviet partisans; the rest miraculously improvised a civil society in the woods, complete with hospital, bathhouse, and tannery. The director, Edward Zwick, and the screenwriter, Clayton Frohman, working with material from Nechama Tec's 1993 historical study of the same title, have shaped a stirring narrative. Though the action—shot by Eduardo Serra very near to the actual sites—is, at times, too theatrically staged, Zwick generally keeps it blunt and terse. Daniel Craig, speaking in a dry, shiv-like voice, is the smart, dominating leader, Tuvia Bielski, and he plays this Moses figure without losing his sex appeal. Liev Schreiber, surly and tough, is his quarrelsome younger brother, and there is an enormous cast of minor actors and extras, some of them memorable. James Newton Howard wrote the thunderous and lachrymose score—the weakest element in the movie.—*D.D.* (1/12/09) (In wide release.)

FROST/NIXON
In its transfer from stage to film, Peter Morgan's account of David Frost's lengthy set of interviews with Richard Nixon, in 1977, three years after he resigned the Presidency, has taken on an aura of momentousness unwarranted by the event itself. Frank Langella's performance provides considerable insights into Nixon's intelligence, caginess, and fraudulent sentimentality, and Michael Sheen makes Frost into a toothy, bright, shallow but smart showman-journalist. The interviews themselves, always absorbing, build to Nixon's climactic admission that he let the country down during the Watergate crisis. The media whirl of negotiation, advisers, preparation, and so on is engaging enough, but the episode itself changed nothing. It was a journalistic coup, not a historical milestone, and the filmmakers don't seem to realize that. Directed by Ron Howard.—*D.D.* (12/8/08) (In wide release.)

GRAN TORINO
Clint Eastwood appears as, in effect, the last white man in America, guarding what might be called the last American car—a green 1972 Ford Gran Torino, lovingly preserved in his garage in run-down Highland Park, just outside Detroit. Eastwood, who also directed, stars as Walt Kowalski, a racist old man who lives next door to a family of Asian immigrants. At first, Walt (a vision of what Dirty Harry might have become) is their antagonist, but he then becomes their protector, as he helps them fight off the neighborhood gangs. The movie ends with a surprising act of renunciation. Although it's a minor work, the film is fascinating if you're interested in Eastwood's reflections on the characters he's played and his role in American iconography.—*D.D.* (12/22 & 29/08) (In wide release.)

JEANNE DIELMAN, 23 QUAI DU COMMERCE, 1080 BRUXELLES
The director Chantal Akerman's three-hour-and-twenty-one-minute shot across the bow of cinematic modernism, from 1975, puts time onscreen as it was never seen before. The title character, played by the porcelain diva Delphine Seyrig, is a middle-aged, middle-class prostitute who turns tricks in her bourgeois apartment with dapper johns who make discreet appointments. Widowed nearly six years, she is raising her adolescent son, Sylvain (Jan Decorte), alone, and handling a standard round of errands and chores—all of which play out at extraordinary length and detail, in static takes framed squarely and distantly. Whether she's making a bed, cooking a meal, bathing herself, or shopping, Seyrig evokes a dancer's intense physical discipline and clipped, angular precision. Such care for the material world borders on the obsessive, and the absence of thought behind Jeanne's rigid, orderly, compartmentalized regime is exactly the point: this living perpetual-motion machine can't bear the slightest immobility, and when the fixed boundaries of her life give way to her work, the results are catastrophic. Akerman's chillingly sardonic feminist fable is built on a sublime paradox, the elusive identity of someone who, as the title suggests, is so easily identified. Her vast elaboration of tiny variations on infinitely repeated gestures recalls the music that Steve Reich and Philip Glass were composing in the same era. In French.—*Richard Brody* (Film Forum; Jan. 23-29.)

MILK
Gus Van Sant's vibrantly entertaining bio-pic recreates, without starchiness, the San Francisco life of the gay activist and politician Harvey Milk (Sean Penn), who was assassinated in 1978, along with Mayor George Moscone, by a fellow-politician, the family-values conservative Dan White (Josh Brolin). The righteous march of events is warmed by the banter, the casual sex, and the candor of the gay milieu in the giddy seventies,

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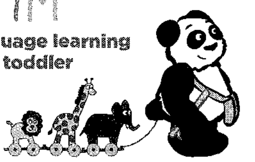

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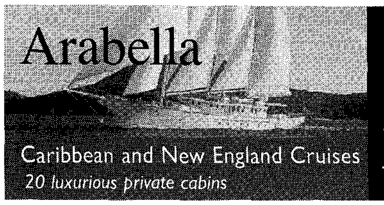
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the period just before AIDS, when life was free and easy. Much of the time, Penn keeps his voice down, but the fervor and humor are there in the most offhanded moments. Without ostentation, he creates a new body, a new temperament: he loosens his neck and shoulders and swivels his head; his smile is enormous and all-embracing; he holds an elbow out and pumps a forearm up and down like a semaphore as Harvey speaks in public. Brolin, a slab of hair lying low across his forehead, gives White a brick-headed, baffled manner, a tormented neediness. In the filmmakers' interpretation, there's a suggestion that White suffered from murderously repressed homosexuality. With James Franco, Emile Hirsch, Diego Luna, and Alison Pill.—*D.D.* (12/1/08) (In wide release.)

MOSES AND AARON

Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet's 1975 film of Arnold Schoenberg's opera brings to life, on location in the desert, a reinterpretation of several crucial episodes of Biblical history—Moses's presentation of God's covenant to his chosen people, his recruitment of his eloquent brother Aaron to preach to them on his behalf, and Aaron's weakening during Moses's forty-day sojourn on Mount Sinai, resulting in the worship of the Golden Calf and Moses's breaking of the tablets bearing the Ten Commandments. The brothers' conflict—between word and image, idea and emotion—is also the directors' argument for their own radically austere style over popular methods. Here, their rarefied aesthetic coheres perfectly with the opera to come off as a kind of twelve-tone filmmaking which, like Schoenberg's music, reclaims a classical ideal in a progressive way that owes nothing to nostalgia. Oblique angles, long takes, and static tableaux allow Straub and Huillet to go straight to the drama inherent in the story and the composition. They respond to every nuance of the opera and reveal both the complex modern music and their own stark images to be as passionate and engaging as they are profound and beautiful. In German.—*R.B.* (Walter Reade; Jan. 25.)

NOTORIOUS

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

OF TIME AND THE CITY

In an empty theatre, a curtain rises on an unusual kind of show: archival footage of life in the streets of Liverpool, where the director, Terence Davies (who was born in 1945), grew up, and which he both celebrates and mourns in this personal, essay-like documentary of urban reminiscences. The lovingly culled source material, galvanized by Davies's grave, caustic, self-revealing voice-overs and his evocative musical selections, is assembled thematically, bringing to life various aspects of his undying attachment to the city he loved and left. The paradoxical romance of heavy industry, the destruction of old parts of town and their replacement with desolate tracts of soul-killing state modernism, and the thrill of astonishingly teeming crowds at soccer games, on beaches, and aboard ferries are all ingeniously conjured through montage sequences, set to music, that suggest the apotheosis of the music video. The self-portrait is rounded out by Davies's cantankerous, witty epigrams on his passion for movies, his rejection of his family's Catholicism, his revulsion at British imperial presumptions, the surprising objects of his adolescent desire, and his curmudgeonly disregard for the Beatles. If the updating of his connection to the city, through recent footage of his own making, rings somewhat hollow, the pathos of his latter-day distance from it nonetheless comes through poignantly.—*R.B.* (Film Forum.)

THE READER

The British director Stephen Daldry made a splash with "The Hours," and this new film is no less worthy, ambitious, and exasperating. The screenwriter, once again, is David Hare, who fillets the best-selling novel by Bernhard Schlink. For all Hare's expertise, however, we are stuck with the unsavory pretensions of the original tale. Kate Winslet plays Hanna, who, thirteen years after the Second World War, works on the trams in Neustadt, West Germany, and has occasional sex with a local teen-age boy named Michael (David Kross). Their first time, though lingeringly shot, has all the finesse of cheap porno; where else does a woman tell a lusty youth to shed his clothes and take a bath because he has dirt on his face? In the movie's second half, we see Hanna being tried and imprisoned for her wartime deeds; there is a shocking revelation, which comes as no surprise; and the middle-aged Michael (Ralph Fiennes) turns up to help his onetime love. Daldry takes things painfully slowly, not helped by a sappy score, and we are encouraged to muse upon the cultural shortcomings, or improvements, in the life of an aging member of the S.S. This is not an issue that most of us feel the need to worry about. With a strong performance, late in the day, from Lena Olin.—*A.L.* (12/15/08) (In wide release.)

REVOLUTIONARY ROAD

Commuters in identical gray suits and hats pour like lava through Grand Central Terminal and settle in to work in vast open floors with shaded glass partitions. Cigarettes are lit and furiously smoked; Martinis, consumed by the bucketful, launch anxious bouts of adultery and heartrending quarrels. We're in the fifties, the alleged graveyard of American hope, and Frank (Leonardo DiCaprio) and April Wheeler (Kate Winslet) are a suburban couple who have the freedom to do nothing but tear each other apart. It turns out that there's a gap between the Wheelers' soaring spiritual ambitions and their actual talents and interests. Their dilemma is grounds for pathos, or possibly for satire, but is it grounds for tragedy? The story, sour and relentless, works toward a gruesomely unhappy ending. Winslet plays April as a will-driven hysteric; DiCaprio gets the externals right, but he's a little afraid of revealing the depths of Frank's shallowness. Watching the two go at each other may be cathartic for some, but it shouldn't be confused with movie art. Sam Mendes directed; Justin Haythe adapted Richard Yates's celebrated 1961 novel.—*D.D.* (12/22 & 29/08) (In wide release.)

THE SECRET OF THE GRAIN

In the French port of Sète, near Montpellier, on the Mediterranean coast, a large family of Tunisian immigrants and their French-born children gather together to eat and quarrel in a heated atmosphere of rivalry and sexual jealousy. The family patriarch (Habib Boufares), a laid-off dockworker desperate to leave something for his children and grandchildren, attempts to impress the local French nabobs with a couscous restaurant that he opens on an old ship. The director, Abdellatif Kechiche, works with a hand-held camera that messily captures the abundant family life; he digs a story out of the flux, and, in the last forty minutes or so, the suspense is terrific. With the beautiful Hafsia Herzi, whose heroic dancing not only saves the restaurant from opening-night disaster but is guaranteed to alter the erotic tastes of Westerners who have made a fetish out of a flat, lean belly. In French, Arabic, and Russian.—*D.D.* (1/12/09) (IFC Center.)

SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE

An eighteen-year-old Muslim tea-boy named Jamal (Dev Patel), born and raised in the poverty of Mumbai, teeters on the verge of fame and fortune. A nation awaits. Such is the old-fashioned, sentimental cliffhanger to which the screenwriter Simon Beaufoy and the director Danny Boyle have, with unembarrassed drive, committed themselves. Jamal is a contestant on the Indian edition of "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?," and the suspicion of the police—who, in an ill-judged prelude to the story, hold and torture him—is that he must have cheated. His response is that experience alone, whether wretched or comic, has by chance furnished him with the correct answers, and the bulk of the film, constructed from flashbacks, proves his point. The style, seen previously in "City of God" and other movies, is what you might call urban-manic: heated performances, even hotter colors, and camerawork that vies with the editing for nerve and speed. The lad at the center of it all is actually on the dull side, but the energy around him—not least in the dance sequence over the final credits—is difficult to resist.—*A.L.* (11/24/08) (In wide release.)

THE UNKNOWN

There's no odder number on Tod Browning's boulevard of broken nightmares than this supremely creepy descent into the pits of masochistic romance. It stars Lon Chaney as Alonzo the Armless, a circus knife-thrower who is virtuosic with the daggers between his toes but all thumbs with the sexy yet man-fearing Nanon (Joan Crawford), the target in his act and the object of his desire. Nanon hates male hands because she hates being pawed, but despite Alonzo's evident handlessness the partnership is made in Hell. Browning and Chaney were masters at exploiting fascinating freakishness; this sixty-one-minute flight of horrific fancy depends on a series of grotesque switcheroos that jolt the nervous system and instill a long-lasting queasiness. Silent. Released in 1927.—*Michael Sragow* (MOMA; Jan. 23.)

VALKYRIE

The new Bryan Singer film marks his reunion with the screenwriter Christopher McQuarrie, with whom he worked on "The Usual Suspects." No suspect is more usual than Adolf Hitler, but this is the first time that Hollywood has taken on the assassination plot that was mounted against him in 1944. Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg (Tom Cruise), newly mutilated in the North African campaign, returns to Berlin and finds common cause with other disenchanted Nazis. Granted personal access to the Führer (David Bamber), he succeeds in planting a bomb, but it fails to eliminate the target; instead, it is the plotters who die. The mechanics of the attempt itself are staged with brio and cunning, each minor hindrance acquiring a tint of black comedy; but the first hour of the film, in which the plan is hatched and bickered over, feels sown with confusion. What finally sinks the film, however, is the treatment of the supporting characters, who seem not only thin in conception (Singer, McQuarrie, and the co-writer Nathan Alexander elided the list of real conspirators, yet there are still too many taken on board here) but also dangerously overplayed. Normally reliable performers like Bill Nighy and Tom Wilkinson look ill at ease in their uniforms, which may be a point in their moral favor but augurs badly for the confidence of the movie. Also with Kenneth Branagh and, as the least plausible German general in the history of warfare, Eddie Izzard.—*A.L.* (1/5/09) (In wide release.)

WALTZ WITH BASHIR

A documentary cartoon may sound like an oxymoron (is it not the duty of animation to elasticate reality?), and Ari Folman's film is indeed impossible to classify. Buried within it is the massacre at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps of West Beirut, in 1982, but much of the movie is composed of dreams and distant recollections, as Folman—who was serving in the Israel Defense Forces at the time—questions his former colleagues and slowly feels his way toward the horror. There are passages of unexpected lyricism, including the Fellini-like vision of a giant waterborne nude, as well as a very funny pastiche of no-budget German pornography, but the harsh editing and the gloomy hues leave you in no doubt as to the sombre purpose of Folman's quest. Whether that justifies the last-minute switch of direction, in which he reverts to actual news footage of the slaughter, is open to debate; the head-on vigor of his animation is already graphic enough. In Hebrew, German, and English.—*A.L.* (1/5/09) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

WENDY AND LUCY

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In limited release.)

THE WRESTLER

A straightforward tale, given tremendous extra punch by its leading man. Mickey Rourke, whose career was long ago laid to rest, rises again to play Randy (the Ram) Robinson, a wrestler whose own career has tumbled from a high of twenty years before. No one else, it seems fair to say, could have played the part; for one thing, no one but Rourke combines a gently spoken sweetness with so glazed and inflated a physique, together with a willingness to be treated by his peers like a veal chop. The scenes in the ring, in which Randy, despite a heart attack, struggles to prolong the dregs of his appeal, are often hard to take; even more agonizing are his attempts to forge enduring bonds with his estranged daughter (Evan Rachel Wood) and a tired stripper (Marisa Tomei). The film has a grainy, bloodied sadness that slips at times into the sentimental, but the director, Darren Aronofsky, knows precisely where the heart of the story beats, and that confidence is a refreshing change after the drippy meanderings of his previous film, "The Fountain." There is nothing less mystical, or more moving, than to watch the Ram reduced to serving at a deli counter: a good man at the end of the line.—*A.L.* (12/15/08) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

BRIDE WARS: In wide release. **JUST ANOTHER LOVE STORY:** Cinema Village. **MARLEY AND ME:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—In première. Jan. 21-23 and Jan. 26-27 at 7 and 9 and Jan. 24-25 at 5, 7, and 9: "Dealing and Wheeling in Small Arms" (2006, Sander Francken). ♦ Films by Carolee Schneeman. Jan. 22-23 at 7:30: "Fuses" (1965-67) and "Kitch's Last Meal" (1973-1978). ♦ "Essential Cinema." Jan. 24 at 4:30: "Ordet" (1955, Carl Theodor Dreyer; in Danish, no subtitles). ♦ Jan. 25 at 4: Short films by Maya Deren, including "Meshes of the Afternoon" (1943).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Jan. 21-22 at 1, 2:50, 4:40, 6:30, 8:20, and 10:10: "Made in U.S.A." (1966, Jean-Luc Godard; in French). ♦ Jan. 23-29 at 1, 4:40, and 8:20: "Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles" (†).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—"CinémaTuesdays." Jan. 27 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "Chiffon's Marriage" (1942, Claude Autant-Lara; in French).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—Through April 5: "After the Revolution: Cuba on Screen." Jan. 23-25 at 11 A.M.: "The Twelve Chairs" (1962, Tomas Gutierrez Alea; in Spanish). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Jan. 23-24: "Dog Eat Dog" (2008, Carlos Moreno; in Spanish). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. Jan. 27 at 8: "Parallel Lines" (2004, Nina Davenport), introduced by the director.

MUSEUM OF JEWISH HERITAGE
36 Battery Pl. (646-437-4202)—Through Jan. 25: "Hiding in Plain Sight: Pre- and Post-War French Cinema." Jan. 21 at 7: "Lacombe, Lucien" (1974, Louis Malle; in French), followed by a Q. & A. with the film historian Dudley Andrew. ♦ Jan. 25 at 1: "Stavisky" (1974, Alain Resnais; in French), followed by a Q. & A. with Andrew. ♦ Jan. 25 at 3:30: "Mr. Klein" (1976, Joseph Losey), followed by a Q. & A. with the historian Alice Kaplan.

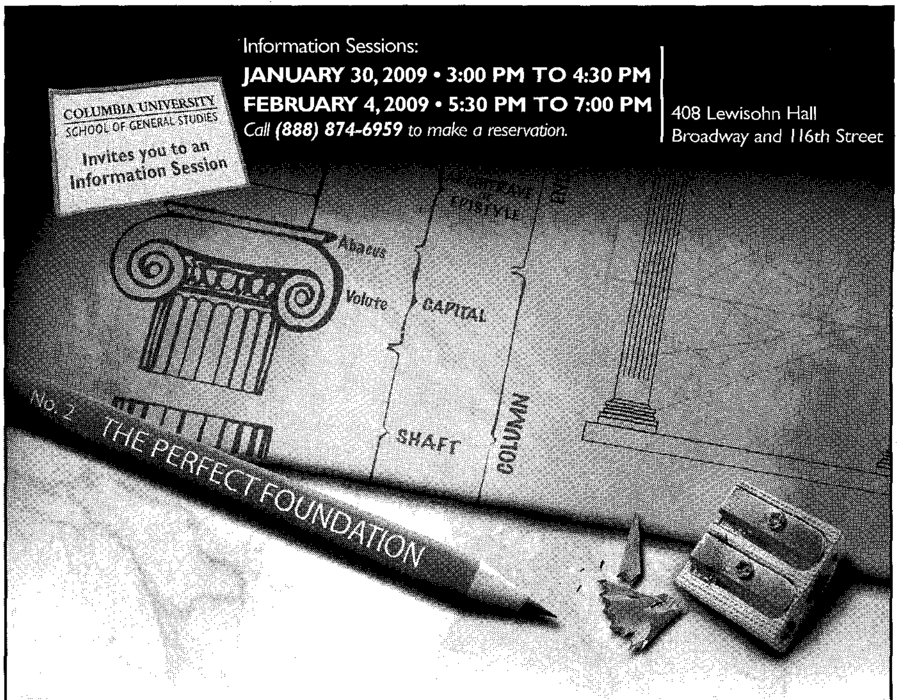
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Still Moving." Jan. 21-23 at 1:30: "The Old Maid" (1939, Edmund Goulding). ♦ Through Jan. 31: "American Politics: From the Archives." Jan. 21 at 5: "The Great McGinty" (1940, Preston Sturges). ♦ Jan. 22 at 6: "Young Mr. Lincoln" (1939, John Ford). ♦ Jan. 22 at 8: "Abraham Lincoln" (1930, D. W. Griffith). ♦ Jan. 23 at 4:30: "King: A Filmed Record . . . Montgomery to Memphis" (1970, Sidney Lumet and Joseph Mankiewicz). ♦ Jan. 24 at 2: "Advise and Consent" (1962, Otto Preminger). ♦ Jan. 24 at 7: "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington" (1939, Frank Capra). ♦ Jan. 26 at 6: "All the King's Men" (1950, Robert Rossen). ♦ "Global Lens 2009." Jan. 21 at 6, Jan. 22-23 at 8, Jan. 24-25 at 2, and Jan. 26 at 8:30: "The Photograph" (2007, Nan Triveni Achnas; in Indonesian). ♦ Jan. 21 at 8 and Jan. 25 at 6: "I Am from Titov Veles" (2007, Teona Strugar Mitevska; in Macedonian). ♦ Jan. 23 at 6: "Those Three" (2007, Naghi Nemati; in Farsi). ♦ Jan. 24 at 4:30: "Getting Home" (2007, Zhang Yang; in Mandarin). ♦ "Batiste Madalena and the Cinema of the 1920s." Jan. 23 at 6: "The Unknown" (†). ♦ Jan. 23 at 8:30: "The Volga Boatman" (1926, Cecil B. De Mille; silent). ♦ Jan. 24 at 7: "The Mysterious Lady" (1928, Fred Niblo; silent).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Special screening, at LaGuardia Performing Arts Center, 31-10 Thomson Ave. (at Van Dam St.), Long Island City. Jan. 23 at 7: "In Between Days" (2006, So Yong Kim), followed by a discussion with the director.

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." Jan. 23 at 9:30: "The Wages of Fear" (1953, Henri-Georges Clouzot; in French), introduced by Terry Winters.

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@ Midnight." Jan. 23-24: "Se7en" (1995, David Fincher).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—Through Jan. 29: The New York Jewish Film Festival. Jan. 21 at 6:15: "A Road to Mecca: The Journey of Muhammad Asad" (2008, Georg Misch; in English, German, Urdu, Ukrainian, Spanish, and Arabic). ♦ Jan. 22 at 1:30 and 6: "Young Freud in Gaza" (2008, PeÅ Holmquist and Suzanne Khardalian; in English and Arabic). ♦ Jan. 22 at 3:45 and 8:30: "The Wedding Song" (2008, Karin Albou; in French, Arabic, and German). ♦ Jan. 24 at 6:30: "Camp Girls" (2008, Gay Block) and "Driving Men" (2008, Susan Mogul). ♦ Jan. 24 at 9:15 and Jan. 26 at 1:15 and 6:15: "The Gift to Stalin" (2008, Rustem Abdrashev; in Russian, Kazakh, and Hebrew). ♦ Jan. 25 at 5:15: "The Return of Nathan Becker" (1932, Boris Shpis and Rokhl M. Milman; in Yiddish and Russian). ♦ Jan. 25 at 7:15: "Being Jewish in France" (2007, Yves Jeuland; in French). ♦ Jan. 26 at 8:30 and Jan. 27 at 1: "Every Mother Should Know" (2008, Nir Toib; in Hebrew). ♦ A tribute to Richard Roud. Jan. 23 at 1:20, 5:10, and 9: "The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena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Bach" (1968, Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet; in German). ♦ Jan. 23 at 3:10 and 7: "La Ronde" (1950, Max Ophüls; in French). ♦ "Cinematic Opera, Operatic Cinema." Jan. 25 at 2: "Moses and Aaron" (†), introduced by the writer David Levin.

READINGS AND TALKS

"SELECTED SHORTS"
The actors Terrence Mann and Boyd Gaines join the writer Joyce Carol Oates for an evening of scary fare, including works by Edgar Allan Poe, Dan Chaon, and Oates. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Jan. 21 at 7.)

STRAND BOOK STORE
The journalist Kenneth Whyte talks with Rachel Sklar about his latest work, "The Uncrowned King: The Sensational Rise of William Randolph Hearst." (Broadway at 12th St. No tickets necessary. Jan. 21 at 7.)

THE POWERHOUSE ARENA
The independent publishers Johnny Temple, of Akashic Books, and Richard Nash, of Soft Skull Press, present two of their writers, the poet Amiri Baraka and the cartoonist David Rees, respectively. (37 Main St., at Water St., Brooklyn. For more information, call 718-666-3049. Jan. 22 at 7.)

TIPA PROJECT READING
TIPA, which stands for Toward International Peace Through the Arts and is the work of the marketer turned activist Stan Tannen, presents a belated inaugural celebration, with Marian Seldes, Eli Wallach, Frances Sternhagen, and other actors reading poetry from around the world, along with works favored by President Obama. (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. No tickets necessary. Jan. 26 at 12:30.)

MCNALLY JACKSON BOOKS
The writer Charles Bock talks with the editor David Ebershoff about his novel, "Beautiful Children." (52 Prince St. No tickets necessary. Jan. 26 at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"NOMAD: TWO WORLDS"
The fashion photographer Russell James recently travelled to the Australian outback and shot landscape photographs of burial grounds, gorges, and other areas of import to Aboriginal spiritual practices. He then invited Aboriginal artists to paint on the prints, and the resulting pieces will be on display at Donna Karan's Urban Zen, in Greenwich Village, during a brief exhibition that also includes a day devoted to the discussion of Aboriginal art and culture, on Jan. 24. (711 Greenwich St. 212-727-2220. Jan. 23-29.)

"THE STEAM POWERED HOUR"
Last year, the *New Yorker* cartoonist Matthew Diffee organized sporadic evenings of bluegrass music and comedy, under the rubric "The Unnamed Music and Comedy Show," which featured the likes of Gillian Welch, Chris Thile, and Demetri Martin. He recently rechristened the series and decided to put it on monthly. On Jan. 25 at 8, the banjo virtuoso Tony Trischka and Diffee's colleague Roz Chast headline. (The Tank, 354 W. 45th St. 212-563-6269.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
A firehouse in Virginia will lose its weathervane after this week's auctions of Americana (Jan. 23-24) at **Sotheby's**. The meteorological instrument in question is impressive; made in the mid-nineteenth century and standing over six feet tall, it has whirled atop the Charley Rouss Fire Company in Winchester since the dark days following the Civil War. The sales are rich in furniture, prints, and silver, offering imposing Chippendale chests, Audubon prints, and several lots of early-eighteenth-century silver beakers from the First Parish Church in Cohasset, on Boston's South Shore. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ On Jan. 21, **Christie's** presents an auction of Chinese export porcelain, with the second of two sessions devoted to the third installment of the collection of Leo and Doris Hodroff, avid connoisseurs. The house's sales of Americana are grouped into two auctions on Jan. 23, with silver in the morning—led by an odd-looking Tiffany drinking cup, fashioned out of an ivory tusk, with ornate silver-gilt trimming—followed by porcelain, folk art, and furniture, the star of which is a Chippendale mahogany bombé chest handed down by generations of the Quincy family. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ The grand **Winter Antiques Show** (Jan. 23-Feb. 1), with offerings from scores of exhibitors, encompassing everything from Roman glass to twentieth-century Scandinavian furniture (pre-1969, that is), returns to the Park Avenue Armory for its fifty-fifth season. (Park Ave. at 67th St. 718-292-7392.) ♦ A slew of galleries will be presenting their wares at another, more eclectic and more modestly priced fair near Gramercy Park, **Antiques at the Armory** (Jan. 23-25), where one can find everything from a weathervane in the shape of a long-skirted lady tennis player to Native American jewelry. (69th Regiment Armory, Lexington Ave. at 25th St. 973-808-5015.)

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TARA HARDY

ON THE HORIZON

CLASSICAL MUSIC
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Jan. 28-31

The Brooklyn Philharmonic begins its season in fine form with "Nuevo Latino," a three-concert series offering a range of vital new music by Latin-American composers. (718-488-5913.)

ART
EASTERN EXPOSURE
Jan. 30-April 19

From James McNeill Whistler to Agnes Martin, artists in the U.S. have long drawn inspiration from the cultures of the East. "The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860-1989," at the Guggenheim, will defy the conventional wisdom that modern art is a Western conceit, with more than two hundred paintings, sculptures, videos, and performances. (212-423-3500.)

MOVIES
FRENCH EVOLUTION
Feb. 3-Mar. 3

The director Jacques Doillon made his first feature in the early nineteen-seventies and captured there—as he continues to do even now—the romantic, social, and familial tribulations of young people. He will appear at the first American retrospective of his work, at French Institute Alliance Française, featuring his prize-winning 1990 movie, "The Little Gangster," and his most recent film, "Just Anybody." (212-355-6160.)

NIGHT LIFE
FELINE GROOVY
Feb. 6-7

Cat Power, the sometimes commanding, sometimes shy singer and songwriter who recently released a second album of soul covers, comes to the Apollo Theatre. (800-745-3000.)

THE THEATRE
CLASSICAL REP
Feb. 9

Jane Fonda, who hasn't appeared on Broadway since 1963, when she headlined Eugene O'Neill's "Strange Interlude," returns to the New York stage for "33 Variations," at the O'Neill. Moisés Kaufman wrote and directs the drama, about a musicologist studying Beethoven's obsession with his "Diabelli Variations." Colin Hanks and Samantha Mathis also star. (212-239-6200.)

Jacques Doillon's "The Little Gangster," at French Institute Alliance Française.

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- The *"Publisher Sub-Class"* (publishers of Books and periodicals, and their successors and assigns).

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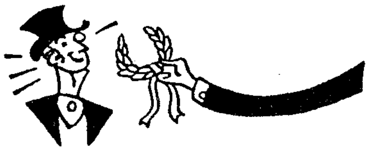
THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

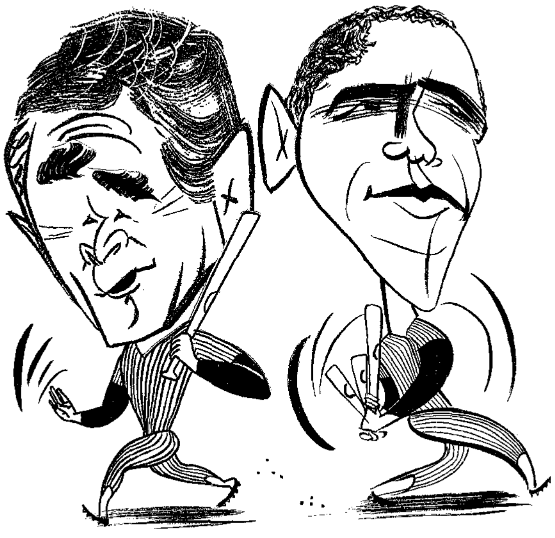
COMMENT
GREATNESS



In American politics, the ultimate contest is trying to get elected President. But the very few people who manage to win that contest then enter another, less visible game, with even longer odds: the race to become one of the handful of Presidents who really matter. Excitement about Barack Obama is at such a high level, and the times are so dire, that he is already well into this second race. The air is thick with comparisons of him to Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt. George W. Bush, meanwhile, is slinking back to Texas with such low ratings that we forget that he made his own run at Presidential greatness. That ambition became apparent after the 9/11 attacks, when Bush adeptly, if briefly, harnessed the hunger for leadership that always follows a major crisis. In those days, incredible as it may seem now, *Bush* was often compared to Lincoln.

For Bush and the people around him, though, the grand ambition was always there, even during the 2000 campaign. Bush was uncannily good at finding slogans that could have a number of different meanings. He often used to say, “Government should do a few things and do them well”; to most of us this sounded like “I'm going to take it easy,” but to him, evidently, it sounded like “Make no small plans!”

O.K., it's armchair psychology, but the idea that most of what Bush did was aimed at restoring the family honor by outperforming his father has seldom steered us wrong. Forty-One came across as pure Connecticut; Forty-Three was a real Texan. Forty-One was a moderate Republican; Forty-Three was a true-blue conservative. And Forty-One was an in-box President who waited for events to unfold and then responded, while Forty-Three changed the course of history. He was working toward this even before 9/11. Without the prodding of any crisis, the Bush Administration dropped out of important international treaties and took a unilateral, anti-diplomatic stance in foreign affairs. It cut taxes deeply and set the federal government on a course from surpluses to deficits. It passed the No Child Left Behind education law, which may be the single most influential piece of domestic legislation in a generation. Within days of 9/11, Bush set in motion a great downgrading of civil liberties and the conquest of Iraq, neither of which followed logically from the attacks; they were, instead, attempts to remake the country and the world.



Two days after being reëlected, Bush announced, “I earned . . . political capital, and now I intend to spend it.” What he mainly spent it on was an attempt to initiate the partial privatization of the Social Security system. Leaving aside its merits as public policy, Social Security is the foundation on which the Democratic Party rests. To begin changing the system into one that allowed individual stock-market accounts (can you imagine how *that* would have worked out?) might have made it possible to realize the long-running conservative dream of a truly dominant Republican Party.

That Bush had bad grandiose plans should not be taken as proof that grandiose Presidential plans are a bad thing. Bill Clinton had them, too. He helped to resurrect the Democratic Party by persuading a lot of disaffected Reagan Democrats to come back into the fold, without sacrificing the Party's natural growth stemming from the country's increasing ethnic diversity. His health-care plan didn't work, but it was an attempt to create a core government benefit that would be as powerful as Social Se-

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

curity. Obama, for his part, has never been accused of being insufficiently ambitious. He'll swing for the fences, too.

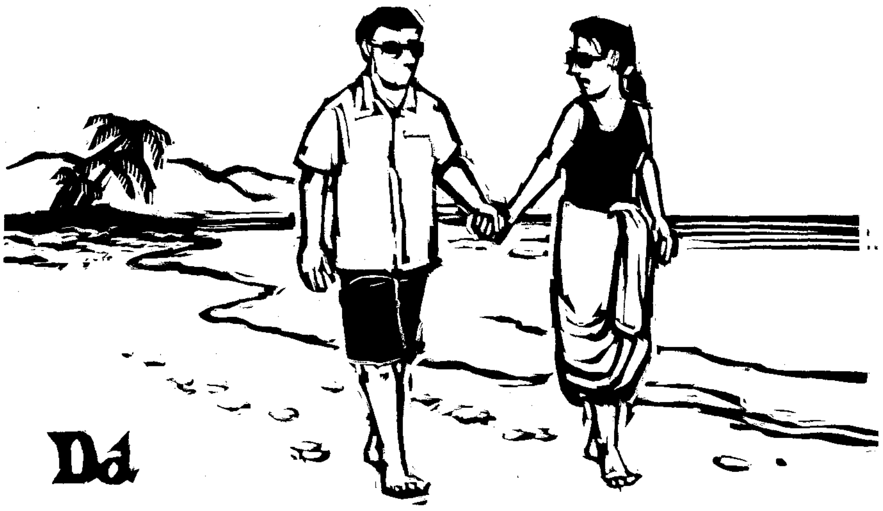
Obama's election was a landmark in American history, but it will, we hope, be a self-negating landmark, because Americans will no longer unconsciously treat not being white as an insuperable barrier to the highest office. His campaign was also a landmark (how many e-mails a week did you get from Obama-land?), but what he did will now be copied to the point of becoming universal. He and the people around him ought to be thinking about what enduring achievements they can accomplish while in office. If that's the test—and it should be—then Obama can't meet it merely by exercising his staggering eloquence, or by quickly putting into place short-term solutions to crises, like the stimulus package, or by changing the tone and the symbolic valence of the government. He has to create institutions that will outlast him.

Lincoln and Roosevelt not only rallied the nation through crisis but also, respectively, made and remade their parties in ways that kept their policies alive. NATO and the United Nations, started on Harry Truman's watch, are still basic shaping forces in the world, in ways that even the most deft Presidential response to even the most urgent international crisis can never be. The same principle applies in domestic affairs: legislation and regulation that affect very large numbers of people and are built to last politically and economically are what great Presidencies are made of.

Obama is a star. So are many of the people around him. A lot of them, like him, rose to adulthood inside the upper reaches of the American meritocracy, which oriented them toward analytic brilliance and felicity of expression, and gave them experience in dealing with fast-moving, high-stakes transactions. Running poky bureaucracies is not what they were trained to do, or even to think of as important. (That may be one reason that Obama is appointing so many czars and considering special envoys to handle situations of the highest urgency, rather than handing them to existing agencies.) It also matters that Obama and his advisers are so obviously alive to the danger of appearing to be big-government liberals and thereby reawakening the great snarling beast of American attack conservatism.

Part of the appeal of Obama's awesomely vague campaign slogan, "Change," was that it evoked the civil-rights movement without saying so directly. This is something that Obama is good at doing in speeches, too: just compare, for subtlety, his references on the night he won the election to having broken the racial barrier with those of everybody else who talked or wrote about it. The implied analogy between the civil-rights movement and the campaign might be carried forward into the Presidency. The movement succeeded for a lot of reasons—inspirational leadership and eloquence among them. But it also succeeded by creating new government agencies with enforcement powers and enough new voters to put several generations of black politicians into power. If you're running the American government, change based on governance and politics matters a whole lot more than change based on intelligence and charisma.

—Nicholas Lemann



"It worries me that you keep referring to our honeymoon as our 'honeymoon period.'"

RECKONING
THIEF OR CROOK?

As anyone in New York can attest, there are multiple Bernie Madoff trials in the works, in addition to the bankruptcy case and the criminal one. "The Talmud makes a distinction between a thief and a crook," Rabbi David Gaffney said last week, at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, on West Sixteenth Street, which was presenting a sold-out panel titled "Madoff: A Jewish Reckoning." "A crook is somebody who comes in with a gun and holds people up. A thief is someone who comes in the night and steals his way into someone's home. The thief is a more despicable person in the Jewish mentality, because he thinks he's fooling God."

This metaphysical accounting for Madoff's alleged crimes was the theme of the panel, which was convened by Martin Peretz, the editor-in-chief of *The New Republic*, and included the historian Simon Schama, the philosopher Michael Walzer, and the prominent businessmen Michael Steinhardt, Mort Zuckerman, and William Ackman. Steinhardt, who has a bushy white mustache and wore an American-flag necktie, was standing in the lobby before the event, talking to his wife on his cell phone. He said that she had a problem with the event, and he handed the phone over. "I don't like the title," she said. "What do you think it means?" After a second, she added, "We'll see what the geniuses say."

First up was Zuckerman, who, Peretz noted in an introduction, "sits at the table of the mighty" and "also lost a pocket of money to Madoff." (The Mortimer B. Zuckerman Charitable Trust was invested with the Madoff-connected fund manager

J. Ezra Merkin.) Zuckerman said that he disliked the phrase "a Jewish reckoning." "It's a Ponzi scheme," he said. "The last time I checked, Ponzi was not Jewish. He was Italian." He pointed out that Kenneth Lay, of Enron, "was never identified as a prominent Protestant energy broker." He brought up the word "credit," which, he noted, comes from the Latin *credere*, "to believe," and concluded, "What Mr. Madoff did and what Mr. Merkin did was to undermine trust."

Next, Schama talked about the historical links between anti-Semitism and capitalism, going back to the tulip bubble of seventeenth-century Holland. Quoting Thomas Carlyle's "The French Revolution," he said, "O shrieking beloved brother blockheads of Mankind!," and went on, "It may be necessary for us to grieve and shriek and sit shivah over this particularly ghastly moment in our collective life." Steinhardt, who lost money with Madoff, too, wondered, more simply, "What was so special about this guy?" Echoing Hannah Arendt, he decried "the banality of investing," and he came down hard on the charities that had trusted Madoff.

Ackman was next, and he used his turn at the lectern to defend Merkin. "My guess is that Mort, No. 1, never read the offering memorandums," he said. "Mort called him up and said, 'I'd like to give you some money,' and Ezra probably said, 'Terrific. I'll send you a copy of the documents,' and his secretary filled them out." (Zuckerman had left the panel early. The next day, he told Ackman that this was not the case.) Ackman said that Merkin wasn't a bad man. A hand went up in the audience: "Don't you think that, at least, we can call Ezra Merkin a lazy man?"

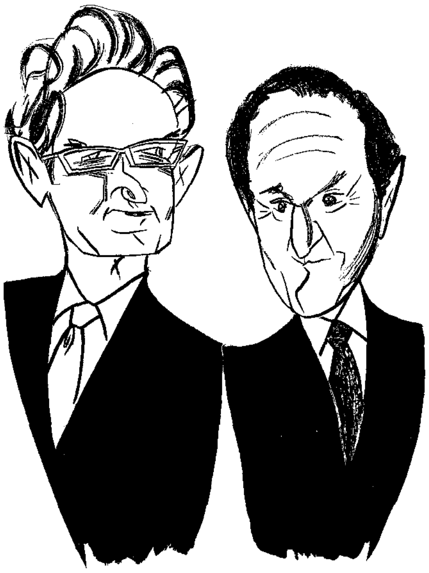
Ackman said no, and this led to a dispute with Peretz, who is the chairman of the Board of Overseers of YIVO, about whether it's appropriate for charity-board members to manage their own charity's money. Peretz said, "Let me say, YIVO didn't have a dime with Madoff."

"But YIVO doesn't have a dime," Ackman replied.

Peretz said, "There are ways to remedy this."

The conversation turned to the S.E.C. ("a bunch of wusses"), and Peretz grew impatient. "I want a Jewish question," he told the audience. An older woman in a purple vest raised her hand. Speaking from a theological perspective, she asked, "What would be an appropriate punishment for Bernie Madoff? Excommunication? Strip him of money, an eye for an eye?" Someone else suggested, "Stoning?"

When the session was over, the audience poured into the aisles. "I think it was fascinating," said Ruth Westheimer, the sex doctor, who'd been sitting up front. She was especially happy because at first she'd been stuck in an overflow room with a simulcast screen. "In the Jewish tradition, there is someone by the name of Hillel," she said. "He didn't have enough money to study, so he'd go up on the roof and listen. I paid for my ticket. Thirty-five dollars and ninety cents." Peretz, too, was pleased with the panel, though he wished people hadn't been so touchy about the title. The phrase "Jewish reckoning" wasn't supposed to have Biblical overtones, he said. "I just made it up."



Simon Schama and Mort Zuckerman

—*Lizzie Widdicombe*

DEPT. OF ANNOTATION

A LONESOME DEATH

In February of 1963, twenty-four-year-old William Zantzinger, armed with a toy carnival cane and wrecked on whiskey, made a spectacle of himself at the Spinsters' Ball at the Emerson Hotel in Baltimore. He was a drunken country mouse in the big city, at a time when the notion of racial equality had barely shown itself in the neighborhood of his father's tobacco farm. When the hotel's black waitstaff was slow to serve Zantzinger another drink, he yelled racial epithets at Hattie Carroll, a barmaid and a fifty-one-year-old mother of eleven, and he rapped her on the shoulder with his cane. She became upset, then collapsed and died of a stroke.

Bob Dylan read about the case in the newspaper. He wrote the magnificent "Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" with the paper splayed on the table of a Seventh Avenue luncheonette. Zantzinger was then and forever after a master villain.

Twenty-five years later, I tried to interview him for a newspaper story. He was working in a real-estate office (there was an equal-housing sticker on the door), and I found Zantzinger a disappointing lump of a man, with small dark eyes and black hair thinning from behind. The eyes followed me angrily as I offered up my two-sides-to-every-story patter, trying to get him to talk.

"There was a girl come down here from Baltimore five years ago," he said. "I didn't talk to her. And one before that. I got nothing to say."

I tried trashing Dylan: "That son of a bitch libelled you. You could've sued his ass for what he did." Zantzinger smiled. "We were gonna sue him big time. Scared that boy good!" he said. "The song was a lie. Just a damned lie."

He enjoyed talking about how his lawyer had fired shots across Dylan's bow. Columbia Records was on the receiving end as well, Zantzinger said, adding that he dropped the idea of a lawsuit because, after being convicted of manslaughter and assault, he'd seen enough of courtrooms and controversy.

By then, too, there was little left of Zantzinger's reputation. But even a dispassionate reading of the facts of the case leads one to conclude that Dylan took great liberties. Hattie Carroll was not "slain by a cane" that was "doomed and determined to destroy all the gentle," as Dylan wrote. No physical injury was done to her, nor was there any evidence to suggest lethal intent. The medical examiner's report—citing Carroll's enlarged heart and severe hypertension—attributed her death as much to

Zantzinger's verbal abuse as to the tap of his cane. Nor did Zantzinger have "high office relations in the politics of Maryland" to influence the case, as Dylan implied.

Zantzinger ran through all of this. He knew the song and its equivocations. He knew precisely the historical role to which it had consigned him.

"He did some good stuff, I guess," he said of Dylan. "The blowing-with-the-wind song, that one? But I'm probably not gonna be the best judge. I mean, for me, he's not much of a singer."

I told Zantzinger about a note I had found in the old homicide file: "Attached is correspondence from . . . a folksinger in New York who seeks information about the aforementioned case, which was investigated by your agency." But Dylan's letter wasn't attached—snatched, perhaps, as a souvenir, from the police files. But the cover sheet, dated months after the release of "Hattie Carroll," was telling. Dylan was apparently writing too late to improve his song's accuracy; his letter was the reaction of a worried young man.

Zantzinger enjoyed that immensely. I told him that the Carroll children would not talk. He acknowledged that he had paid them money in an out-of-court settlement.

"I know that I caused that woman's death," he said. "I'm responsible. Me talking does nothing for that woman or her family. Just put this in your article: I admire and respect the Carroll family for their decision not to talk publicly. Like them, I think the best thing to do is let it rest." When I got up to go, he extended his hand, and I took it. He stayed in his chair, and I saw myself out.

Picasso said that art is the lie that shows us the truth, and that's how Dylan and his ballad should probably be judged. But to hold that standard to William Zantzinger, the man, who died earlier this month, at the age of sixty-nine, seems too crude a measure. In 1963, he was sentenced to six months in jail for Hattie Carroll's death, on the same day as the March on Washington.

Zantzinger lived long enough to see Martin Luther King, Jr., honored with a national holiday and to know that this week Barack Obama would be inaugurated as President. We can imagine him galled at this outcome, a small-minded racist rightly defined by his ugliest moment. Perhaps that's him, or perhaps he was more than that. At any rate, he knew his part and he played it to the end.

—*David Simon*

TOOL KIT
SMART POWER

During the late campaign, various excitable conservatives warned that the next Administration, if it turned out to be a Democratic one, would be guided by what one of them referred to as "Marxist tendencies." We won't know for sure about that till this week at the earliest. But there are already signs that the dialectic favored by the forthcoming *novus ordo seclorum* may well display what Sean Hannity would probably not call "Hegelian tendencies."

Thesis: Hard Power. The kind fetishized by the outgoing Bush crowd, especially Cheney. Guns, bombs, tanks. Humvees, Hueys, M16s. All about blood and guts. *Antithesis: Soft Power.* The kind preferred by certain thinkers and political scientists, including, most prominently, Joseph S. Nye, Jr., the Sultan of Oman Professor of International Relations at Harvard. Movies, books, songs. Ideals, diplomacy, moral authority. All about hearts and minds. *Synthesis: Smart Power.* The kind favored by—well, here's Hillary Clinton, the Secretary of State-designate, in her opening statement, last Tuesday, at her confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee:

> We must use what has been called smart power, the full range of tools at our disposal—diplomatic, economic, military, political, legal, and cultural—picking the right tool, or combination of tools, for each situation. With smart power, diplomacy will be the vanguard of our foreign policy. This is not a radical idea. The ancient Roman poet Terence declared that "in every endeavor, the seemly course for wise men is to try persuasion first." The same truth binds wise women as well.

Up here in New York, another wise woman was surprised and delighted by the fuss down there in Washington: the coiner of the phrase, Suzanne Nossel. "Smart Power" was the title of an article Nossel had written in a 2004 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, the same magazine in which George Kennan, writing as "X" in 1947, put a name to what became American policy for the next forty years: "containment." Nossel's article was altogether more modest, proposing to renew the venerable doctrine of liberal internationalism in a non-stupid way. It was kind of a no-brainer: You can be too hard, you can be too soft, and you can be too clever by half. But you can't be too smart.

"Smart power" has proved to have legs. Joseph Nye picked up on it, and in 2006 he and Richard Armitage, who had been Colin Powell's deputy at the State Department, launched a bipartisan Commission on Smart Power. And now, as Senator Jim Webb, of Virginia, said at the Hillary hearing, "The phrase of the week is 'smart power.' "

Who's Suzanne Nossel? She's in her late thirties, she has the strawberry-blond ringlets of a Dickens heroine, and she's the chief operating officer of Human Rights Watch. When she wrote the "Smart Power" article, she was an executive at Bertelsmann, the media company, but she has had a finger in the Democratic foreign-policy pie since forever. In the early nineteen-nineties, she worked in Johannesburg, helping to implement South Africa's National Peace Accord during the transition to democracy. During the Clinton Administration, she was a deputy under Ambassador Richard Holbrooke at the U.N. In 2005, she founded DemocracyArsenal.org, a progressive foreign-policy blog. She's married to David Greenberg, a history professor at Rutgers and a *Slate* columnist, and they have two kids, Leo, four, and Liza, two.

"Hillary was impressive," Nossel said a couple of days afterward, in her office, about a third of the way up the Empire State Building. "She didn't gloss over the difficulties, but at the same time she was fundamentally optimistic. She's saying that, by using all the tools of power in concert, the trajectory of American decline can be reversed. She'll make smart power cool."

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

THE FINANCIAL PAGE
A SMARTER STIMULUS

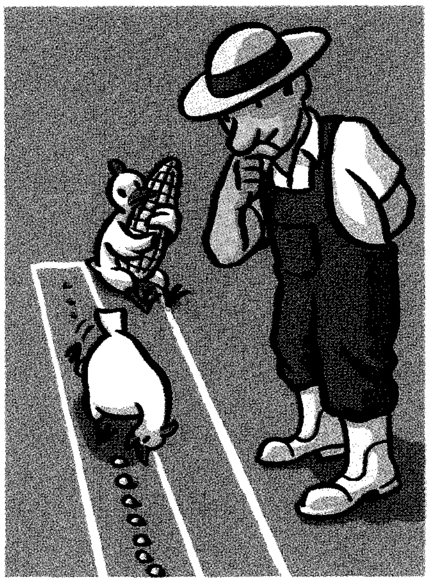
Cutting taxes is usually a surefire political winner. Yet Barack Obama's plan to include more than a hundred billion dollars in individual tax rebates in his stimulus package has earned him criticism from both ends of the political spectrum. Critics in his own party think the rebate, which Obama wants to distribute by reducing people's withholding payments, will be too small to make a difference—the equivalent of an extra forty dollars or so a month. Naysayers from the right maintain that, because the tax rebate is a onetime event rather than a permanent reduction in tax rates, it will have only a negligible effect. Skeptics on both sides worry that most people will save the rebate rather than spend it.

The criticism isn't unwarranted. The record of past tax rebates is checkered, and forty bucks a month doesn't sound like much. But the very things that seem unusual about Obama's rebate plan—that it will be handed out by reducing withholding, instead of in one lump sum, and that it will add a small but steady amount to Americans' take-home pay—are precisely why it's more likely to succeed.

Past tax rebates, as many economists have argued in recent weeks, haven't seemed to boost consumption as much as was hoped. Some estimates suggest that when a rebate was handed out in 2001 less than half of it was spent. And while the results of last year's rebate seem to have been somewhat more encouraging, much of it still went unspent. One explanation for why rebates don't have a bigger impact is that they don't affect what Milton Friedman called people's "permanent income." Friedman argued that people's spending is determined by what they think their income will be over time: they change their spending habits only if they think they're going to be permanently wealthier or poorer.

The permanent-income hypothesis is elegant, but studies have shown that it's not always an accurate description of the way people decide how to spend and save. A more compelling explanation for why rebates haven't worked very well is that they have been handed out as lump sums.

You might think that handing people a big chunk of change is a perfect way to get them to spend it. But it isn't, because people don't treat all windfalls as found money. Instead, in the words of the behavioral economist Richard Thaler, people put different windfalls in different "mental accounts," which in turn influences what they do with the money. Where the money comes from can have a big impact on whether people spend it or save it: casino winnings are more likely to be spent than, say, money from an inheritance. The framing of a windfall is important, too: a recent study by the business professors Nicholas Epley and Ayelet Gneezy showed that when a tax rebate was presented as a bonus it was more likely to be spent than when it was presented as a refund. And the size of the windfall matters a lot: the bigger the windfall the more likely it is to be saved. One fascinating study of Israelis who received reparations from Germany found that those who received the biggest payments spent very little of the money, while those who received small payments spent it all.



The key factor in these kinds of distinctions, Thaler's work suggests, is whether people think of a windfall as wealth or as income. If they think of it as wealth, they're more likely to save it, and if they think of it as income they're more likely to spend it. That's because many people tend to base their spending not on their long-term earning potential or on their assets but on what they think of as their current income, an amount best defined by what's in their regular paycheck. When that number goes up, so does people's spending. In Thaler's words, "People tend to consume from income and leave perceived 'wealth' alone."

So what does this mean for making a rebate work? If you want people to spend the money, you don't want to give them one big check, because that makes it more likely that they'll think of it as an increase in their wealth and save it. Instead, you want to give them small amounts over time. And you want the rebate to show up as an increase in people's take-home pay, because an increase in steady income is more likely to translate into an increase in spending. What can accomplish both of these goals? Reducing people's withholding payments.

It may seem odd that framing the same policy in different ways will change the way people respond to that policy. But it's well established that the way choices are framed often has a huge impact on the decisions people make. In a recent experiment, Valrie Chambers and Marilyn Spencer found that, just as Obama's proposal suggests, people were more likely to spend a tax refund when it was handed out in monthly installments than in one lump payment.

There's even some history to draw on in this regard. In 1992, the first President Bush temporarily reduced people's withholding payments. He didn't cut taxes—people still owed the same amount at the end of the year—but the move made people's take-home pay look better than it was. In textbook economics, this should have had no impact on spending. Yet one survey suggests that almost half of the people planned to spend most of their rebate. If the effect was that large with a tax cut that didn't even exist, it should be significantly bigger when the government is handing out real money. On its own, Obama's rebate plan isn't going to resurrect the economy. But it's a policy that works with people as they are, rather than as we imagine they should be. And that's a stimulus in itself.

—*James Surowiecki*

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James Surowiecki's blog, The Balance Sheet.

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ANNALS OF PUBLIC POLICY

GETTING THERE FROM HERE

How should Obama reform health care?

BY ATUL GAWANDE

In every industrialized nation, the movement to reform health care has begun with stories about cruelty. The Canadians had stories like the 1946 Toronto *Globe and Mail* report of a woman in labor who was refused help by three successive physicians, apparently because of her inability to pay. In Australia, a 1954 letter published in the Sydney *Morning Herald* sought help for a young woman who had lung disease. She couldn't afford to refill her oxygen tank, and had been forced to ration her intake "to a point where she is on the borderline of death." In Britain, George Bernard Shaw was at a London hospital visiting an eminent physician when an assistant came in to report that a sick man had arrived requesting treatment. "Is he worth it?" the physician asked. It was the normality of the question that shocked Shaw and prompted his scathing and influential 1906 play, "The Doctor's Dilemma." The British health system, he charged, was "a conspiracy to exploit popular credulity and human suffering."

In the United States, our stories are like the one that appeared in the *Times* before Christmas. Starla Darling, pregnant and due for delivery, had just taken maternity leave from her factory job at Archway & Mother's Cookie Company, in Ashland, Ohio, when she received a letter informing her that the company was going out of business. In three days, the letter said, she and almost three hundred co-workers would be laid off, and would lose their health-insurance coverage. The company was self-insured, so the employees didn't have the option of paying for the insurance themselves—their insurance plan was being terminated.

"When I heard that I was losing my insurance, I was scared," Darling told the *Times*. Her husband had been laid off from his job, too. "I remember that the bill for my son's delivery in 2005 was about $9,000, and I knew I would never be able to pay that by myself." So she prevailed on her midwife to induce labor while she still had insurance coverage. During labor, Darling began bleeding profusely, and needed a Cesarean section. Mother and baby pulled through. But the insurer denied Darling's claim for coverage. The couple ended up owing more than seventeen thousand dollars.

The stories become unconscionable in any society that purports to serve the needs of ordinary people, and, at some alchemical point, they combine with opportunity and leadership to produce change. Britain reached this point and enacted universal health-care coverage in 1945, Canada in 1966, Australia in 1974. The United States may finally be there now. In 2007, fifty-seven million Americans had difficulty paying their medical bills, up fourteen million from 2003. On average, they had two thousand dollars in medical debt and had been contacted by a collection agency at least once. Because, in part, of underpayment, half of American hospitals operated at a loss in 2007. Today, large numbers of employers are limiting or dropping insurance coverage in order to stay afloat, or simply going under—even hospitals themselves.

Yet wherever the prospect of universal health insurance has been considered, it has been widely attacked as a Bolshevik fantasy—a coercive system to be imposed upon people by benighted socialist master planners. People fear the unintended consequences of drastic change, the blunt force of government. However terrible the system may seem, we all know that it could be worse—especially for those who already have dependable coverage and access to good doctors and hospitals.

Many would-be reformers hold that "true" reform must simply override those fears. They believe that a new system will be far better for most people, and that those who would hang on to the old do so out of either lack of imagination or narrow self-interest. On the left, then, single-payer enthusiasts argue that the only coherent solution is to end private health insurance and replace it with a national insurance program. And, on the right, the free marketeers argue that the only coherent solution is to end public insurance and employer-controlled health benefits so that we can all buy our own coverage and put market forces to work.

Neither side can stand the other. But both reserve special contempt for the pragmatists, who would build around the mess we have. The country has this one chance, the idealist maintains, to sweep away our inhumane, wasteful patchwork system and replace it with something new and more rational. So we should prepare for a bold overhaul, just as every other Western democracy has. True reform requires transformation at a stroke. But is this really the way it has occurred in other countries? The answer is no. And the reality of how health reform has come about elsewhere is both surprising and instructive.

No example is more striking than that of Great Britain, which has the most socialized health system in the industrialized world. Established on July 5, 1948, the National Health Service owns the vast majority of the country's hospitals, blood banks, and ambulance operations, employs most specialist physicians as salaried government workers, and has made medical care available to every resident for free. The system is so thoroughly government-controlled that, across the Atlantic, we imagine it had to have been imposed by fiat, by the coercion of ideological planners bending the system to their will.

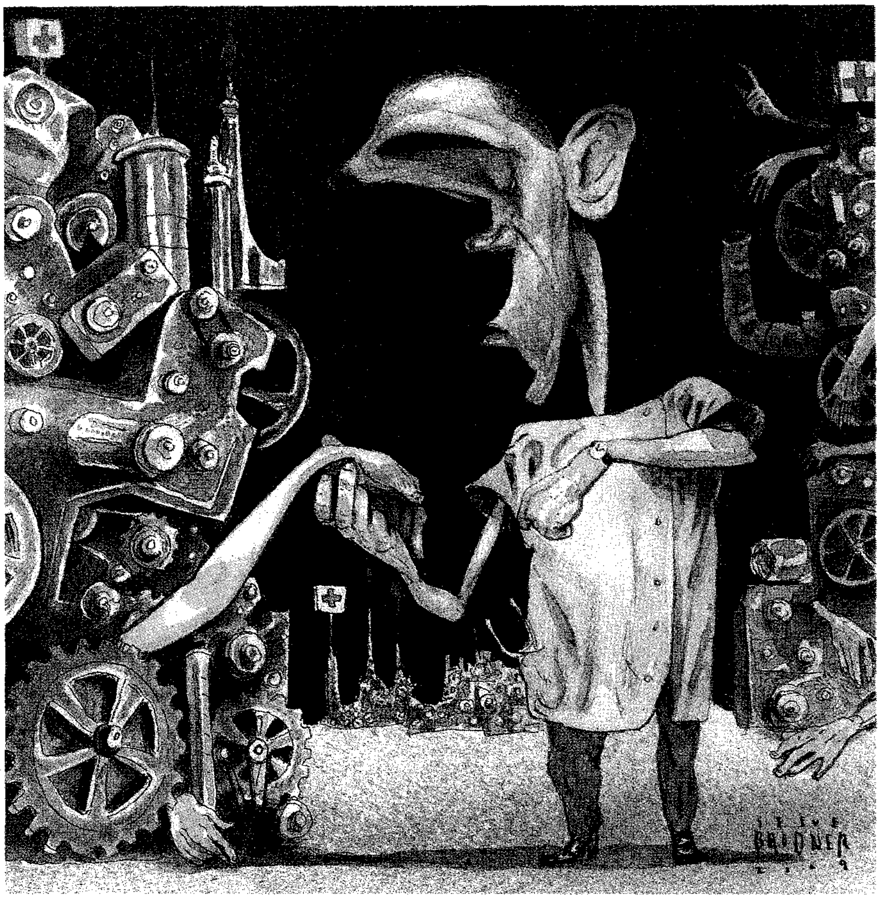
But look at the news report in the *Times* of London on July 6, 1948, headlined "FIRST DAY OF HEALTH SERVICE." You might expect descriptions of bureaucratic shock troops walking into hospitals, insurance-company executives and doctors protesting in the streets, patients standing outside chemist shops worrying about whether they can get their prescriptions filled. Instead, there was only a four-paragraph notice between an item on the King and Queen's return from a holiday in Scotland and one on currency problems in Germany.

The beginning of the new national health service "was taking place smoothly," the report said. No major problems were noted by the 2,751 hospitals involved or by patients arriving to see their family doctors. Ninety per cent of the British Medical Association's members signed up with the program voluntarily—and found that they had a larger and steadier income by doing so. The greatest difficulty, it turned out, was the unexpected pent-up demand for everything from basic dental care to pediatric visits for hundreds of thousands of people who had been going without.

The program proved successful and lasting, historians say, precisely because it was not the result of an ideologue's master plan. Instead, the N.H.S. was a pragmatic outgrowth of circumstances peculiar to Britain immediately after the Second World War. The single most important moment that determined what Britain's health-care system would look like was not any policymaker's meeting in 1945 but the country's declaration of war on Germany, on September 3, 1939.

As tensions between the two countries mounted, Britain's ministers realized that they would have to prepare not only for land and sea combat but also for air attacks on cities on an unprecedented scale. And so, in the days before war was declared, the British government oversaw an immense evacuation; three and a half million people moved out of the cities and into the countryside. The government had to arrange transport and lodging for those in need, along with supervision, food, and schooling for hundreds of thousands of children whose parents had stayed behind to join in the war effort. It also had to insure that medical services were in place—both in the receiving regions, whose populations had exploded, and in the cities, where up to two million war-injured civilians and returning servicemen were anticipated.

As a matter of wartime necessity, the government began a national Emergency Medical Service to supplement the local services. Within a period of months,



Our jerry-rigged health-care system contains many models that reformers can build on.

STEVE BRODNER

sometimes weeks, it built or expanded hundreds of hospitals. It conducted a survey of the existing hospitals and discovered that essential services were either missing or severely inadequate—laboratories, X-ray facilities, ambulances, care for fractures and burns and head injuries. The Ministry of Health was forced to upgrade and, ultimately, to operate these services itself.

The war compelled the government to provide free hospital treatment for civilian casualties, as well as for combatants. In London and other cities, the government asked local hospitals to transfer some of the sick to private hospitals in the outer suburbs in order to make room for victims of the war. As a result, the government wound up paying for a large fraction of the private hospitals' costs. Likewise, doctors received government salaries for the portion of their time that was devoted to the new wartime medical service. When the Blitz came, in September, 1940, vast numbers of private hospitals and clinics were destroyed, further increasing the government's share of medical costs. The private hospitals and doctors whose doors were still open had far fewer paying patients and were close to financial ruin.

IT MUST HAVE BEEN THE SPIRITS

It must have been the spirits that I drank last night,
it must have been that I was drowsing, I'd been tired all day long.

The black wooden column vanished before me,
with the ancient head; and the dining-room door,
and the armchair, the red one; and the little settee.
In their place came a street in Marseilles.
And freed now, brazenly, my soul
appeared there once again and moved about,
along with the form of a sensitive, pleasure-bent youth—
the dissolute youth: that, too, must be said.

It must have been the spirits that I drank last night,
it must have been that I was drowsing, I'd been tired all day long.

My soul was released; the poor thing, it's
always constrained by the weight of the years.

My soul was released and it showed me
a *sympathique* street in Marseilles,
with the form of the happy, dissolute youth
who never felt ashamed, not he, certainly.

—*C. P. Cavafy*

(*An unfinished poem, translated, from the Greek, by Daniel Mendelsohn.*)

Churchill's government intended the program to be temporary. But the war destroyed the status quo for patients, doctors, and hospitals alike. Moreover, the new system proved better than the old. Despite the ravages of war, the health of the population had improved. The medical and social services had reduced infant and adult mortality rates. Even the dental care was better. By the end of 1944, when the wartime medical service began to demobilize, the country's citizens did not want to see it go. The private hospitals didn't, either; they had come to depend on those government payments.

By 1945, when the National Health Service was proposed, it had become evident that a national system of health coverage was not only necessary but also largely already in place—with nationally run hospitals, salaried doctors, and free care for everyone. So, while the ideal of universal coverage was spurred by those horror stories, the particular system that emerged in Britain was not the product of socialist ideology or a deliberate policy process in which all the theoretical options were weighed. It was, instead, an almost conservative creation: a program that built on a tested, practical means of providing adequate health care for everyone, while protecting the existing services that people depended upon every day. No other major country has adopted the British system—not because it didn't work but because other countries came to universalize health care under entirely different circumstances.

In France, in the winter of 1945, President de Gaulle was likewise weighing how to insure that his nation's population had decent health care after the devastation of war. But the system that he inherited upon liberation had no significant public insurance or hospital sector. Seventy-five per cent of the population paid cash for private medical care, and many people had become too destitute to afford heat, let alone medications or hospital visits.

Long before the war, large manufacturers and unions had organized collective insurance funds for their employees, financed through a self-imposed payroll tax, rather than a set premium. This was virtually the only insurance system in place, and it became the scaffolding for French health care. With an almost impossible range of crises on its hands—food shortages, destroyed power plants, a quarter of the population living as refugees—the de Gaulle government had neither the time nor the capacity to create an entirely new health-care system. So it built on what it had, expanding the existing payroll-tax-funded, private insurance system to cover all wage earners, their families, and retirees. The self-employed were added in the nineteen-sixties. And the remainder of uninsured residents were finally included in 2000.

Today, Sécurité Sociale provides payroll-tax-financed insurance to all French residents, primarily through a hundred and forty-four independent, not-for-profit, local insurance funds. The French health-care system has among the highest public-satisfaction levels of any major Western country; and, compared with Americans, the French have a higher life expectancy, lower infant mortality, more physicians, and lower costs. In 2000, the World Health

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Organization ranked it the best health-care system in the world. (The United States was ranked thirty-seventh.)

Switzerland, because of its wartime neutrality, escaped the damage that drove health-care reform elsewhere. Instead, most of its citizens came to rely on private commercial health-insurance coverage. When problems with coverage gaps and inconsistencies finally led the nation to pass its universal-coverage law, in 1994, it had no experience with public insurance. So the country—you get the picture now—built on what it already had. It required every resident to purchase private health insurance and provided subsidies to limit the cost to no more than about ten per cent of an individual's income.

Every industrialized nation in the world except the United States has a national system that guarantees affordable health care for all its citizens. Nearly all have been popular and successful. But each has taken a drastically different form, and the reason has rarely been ideology. Rather, each country has built on its own history, however imperfect, unusual, and untidy.

Social scientists have a name for this pattern of evolution based on past experience. They call it "path-dependence." In the battles between Betamax and VHS video recorders, Mac and P.C. computers, the QWERTY typewriter keyboard and alternative designs, they found that small, early events played a far more critical role in the market outcome than did the question of which design was better. Paul Krugman received a Nobel Prize in Economics in part for showing that trade patterns and the geographic location of industrial production are also path-dependent. The first firms to get established in a given industry, he pointed out, attract suppliers, skilled labor, specialized financing, and physical infrastructure. This entrenches local advantages that lead other firms producing similar goods to set up business in the same area—even if prices, taxes, and competition are stiffer. "The long shadow cast by history over location is apparent at all scales, from the smallest to the largest—from the cluster of costume jewelry firms in Providence to the concentration of 60 million people in the Northeast Corridor," Krugman wrote in 1991.

With path-dependent processes, the outcome is unpredictable at the start. Small, often random events early in the process are "remembered," continuing to have influence later. And, as you go along, the range of future possibilities gets narrower. It becomes more and more unlikely that you can simply shift from one path to another, even if you are locked in on a path that has a lower payoff than an alternate one.

The political scientist Paul Pierson observed that this sounds a lot like politics, and not just economics. When a social policy entails major setup costs and large numbers of people who must devote time and resources to developing expertise, early choices become difficult to reverse. And if the choices involve what economists call "increasing returns"—where the benefits of a policy increase as more people organize their activities around it—those early decisions become self-reinforcing. America's transportation system developed this way. The century-old decision to base it on gasoline-powered automobiles led to a gigantic manufacturing capacity, along with roads, repair facilities, and fuelling stations that now make it exceedingly difficult to do things differently.

There's a similar explanation for our employment-based health-care system. Like Switzerland, America made it through the war without damage to its domestic infrastructure. Unlike Switzerland, we sent much of our workforce abroad to fight. This led the Roosevelt Administration to impose national wage controls to prevent inflationary increases in labor costs. Employers who wanted to compete for workers could, however, offer commercial health insurance. That spurred our distinctive reliance on private insurance obtained through one's place of employment—a source of troubles (for employers and the unemployed alike) that we've struggled with for six decades.

Some people regard the path-dependence of our policies as evidence of weak leadership; we have, they charge, allowed our choices to be constrained by history and by vested interests. But that's too simple. The reality is that leaders are held responsible for the hazards of change as well as for the benefits. And the history of master-planned transformation isn't exactly inspiring. The familiar horror story is Mao's Great Leap Forward, where the collectivization of farming caused some thirty million deaths from famine. But, to take an example from our own era, consider Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's disastrous reinvention of modern military operations for the 2003 invasion of Iraq, in which he insisted on deploying far fewer ground troops than were needed. Or consider a health-care example: the 2003 prescription-drug program for America's elderly.

This legislation aimed to expand the Medicare insurance program in order to provide drug coverage for some ten million elderly Americans who lacked it, averaging fifteen hundred dollars per person annually. The White House, congressional Republicans, and the pharmaceutical industry opposed providing this coverage through the existing Medicare public-insurance program. Instead, they created an entirely new, market-oriented program that offered the elderly an online choice of competing, partially subsidized commercial drug-insurance plans. It was, in theory, a reasonable approach. But it meant that twenty-five million Americans got new drug plans, and that all sixty thousand retail pharmacies in the United States had to establish contracts and billing systems for those plans.

On January 1, 2006, the program went into effect nationwide. The result was chaos. There had been little realistic consideration of how millions of elderly people with cognitive difficulties, chronic illness, or limited English would manage to select the right plan for themselves. Even the savviest struggled to figure out how to navigate the choices: insurance companies offered 1,429 prescription-drug plans across the country. People arrived at their pharmacy only to discover that they needed an insurance card that hadn't come, or that they hadn't received pre-authorization for their drugs, or had switched to a plan that didn't cover the drugs they took. Tens of thousands were unable to get their prescriptions filled, many for essential drugs like insulin, inhalers, and blood-pressure medications. The result was a public-health crisis in thirty-seven states, which had to provide emergency pharmacy payments for the frail. We will never

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Gahan Wilson

"Well, all I can say, sir, is that it's a darn good thing for Barton, Franklin, Battersby, Klempstein & Pierce that you decided not to become a Zen monk!"

• •

know how many were harmed, but it is likely that the program killed people.

This is the trouble with the lure of the ideal. Over and over in the health-reform debate, one hears serious policy analysts say that the only genuine solution is to replace our health-care system (with a single-payer system, a free-market system, or whatever); anything else is a missed opportunity. But this is a siren song.

Yes, American health care is an appallingly patched-together ship, with rotting timbers, water leaking in, mercenaries on board, and fifteen per cent of the passengers thrown over the rails just to keep it afloat. But hundreds of millions of people depend on it. The system provides more than thirty-five million hospital stays a year, sixty-four million surgical procedures, nine hundred million office visits, three and a half billion prescriptions. It represents a sixth of our economy. There is no dry-docking health care for a few months, or even for an afternoon, while we rebuild it. Grand plans admit no possibility of mistakes or failures, or the chance to learn from them. If we get things wrong, people will die. This doesn't mean that ambitious reform is beyond us. But we have to start with what we have.

That kind of constraint isn't unique to the health-care system. A century ago, the modern phone system was built on a structure that came to be called the P.S.T.N., the Public Switched Telephone Network. This automated system connects our phone calls twenty-four hours a day, and over time it has had to be upgraded. But you can't turn off the phone system and do a reboot. It's too critical to too many. So engineers have had to add on one patch after another.

The P.S.T.N. is probably the shaggiest, most convoluted system around; it contains tens of millions of lines of software code. Given a chance for a do-over, no self-respecting engineer would create anything remotely like it. Yet this jerry-rigged system has provided us with 911 emergency service, voice mail, instant global connectivity, mobile-phone lines, and the transformation from analog to digital communication. It has also been fantastically reliable, designed to have as little as two hours of total downtime every forty years. As a system that can't be turned off, the P.S.T.N. may be the ultimate in path-dependence. But that hasn't prevented dramatic change. The structure may not have undergone revolution; the way it functions has. The P.S.T.N. has made the twenty-first century possible.

So accepting the path-dependent nature of our health-care system—recognizing that we had better build on what we've got—doesn't mean that we have to curtail our ambitions. The overarching goal of health-care reform is to establish a system that has three basic attributes. It should leave no one uncovered—medical debt must disappear as a cause of personal bankruptcy in America. It should no longer be an economic catastrophe for employers. And it should hold doctors, nurses, hospitals, drug and device companies, and insurers collectively responsible for making care better, safer, and less costly.

We cannot swap out our old system for a new one that will accomplish all this. But we can build a new system on the old one. On the start date for our new health-care system—on, say, January 1, 2011—there need be no noticeable change for the vast majority of Americans who have dependable coverage and decent health care. But we can construct a kind of lifeboat alongside it for those who have been left out or dumped out, a rescue program for people like Starla Darling.

In designing this program, we'll inevitably want to build on the institutions we already have. That precept sounds as if it would severely limit our choices. But our health-care system has been a hodgepodge for so long that we actually have experience with all kinds of systems. The truth is that American health care has been more flotilla than ship. Our veterans' health-care system is a program of twelve hundred government-run hospitals and other medical facilities all across the country (just like Britain's). We could open it up to other people. We could give people a chance to join Medicare, our government insurance program (much like Canada's). Or we could provide people with coverage through the benefits program that federal workers already have, a system of private-insurance choices (like Switzerland's).

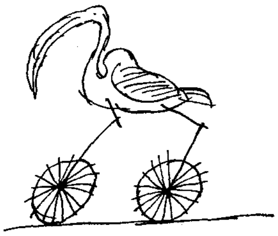
These are all established programs, each with advantages and disadvantages. The veterans' system has low costs, one of the nation's best information-technology systems for health care, and quality of care that (despite what you've heard) has, in recent years, come to exceed the private sector's on numerous measures. But it has a tightly limited choice of clinicians—you can't go to see any doctor you want, and the nearest facility may be far away from where you live. Medicare allows you to go to almost any private doctor or hospital you like, and has been enormously popular among its beneficiaries, but it costs about a third more per person and has had a hard time getting doctors and hospitals to improve the quality and safety of their care. Federal workers are entitled to a range of subsidized private-insurance choices, but insurance companies have done even less than Medicare to contain costs and most have done little to improve health care (although there are some striking exceptions).

Any of the programs could allow us to offer a starting group of Americans—the uninsured under twenty-five years of age, say—the chance to join within weeks. With time and experience, the programs could be made available to everyone who lacks coverage. The current discussion between the Obama Administration and congressional leaders seems to center on opening up the federal workers' insurance options *and* Medicare (or the equivalent) this way, with subsidized premiums for those with low incomes. The costs have to be dealt with. The leading proposals would try to hold down health-care spending in various ways (by, for example, requiring better management of patients with expensive chronic diseases); employers would have to pay some additional amount in taxes if they didn't provide health insurance for their employees. There's nothing easy about any of this. But, if we accept it, we'll all have a lifeboat when we need one.

It won't necessarily be clear what the final system will look like. Maybe employers will continue to slough off benefits, and that lifeboat will grow to become the entire system. Or maybe employers will decide to strengthen their benefits programs to attract employees, and American health care will emerge as a mixture of the new and the old. We could have Medicare for retirees, the V.A. for veterans, employer-organized insurance for some workers, federally organized insurance for others. The system will undoubtedly be messier than anything an idealist would devise. But the results would almost certainly be better.

Massachusetts, where I live and work, recently became the first state to adopt a system of universal health coverage for its residents. It didn't organize a government takeover of the state's hospitals or insurance companies, or force people into a new system of state-run clinics. It built on what existed. On July 1, 2007, the state began offering an online choice of four private insurance plans for people without health coverage. The cost is zero for the poor; for the rest, it is limited to no more than about eight per cent of income. The vast majority of families, who had insurance through work, didn't notice a thing when the program was launched. But those who had no coverage had to enroll in a plan or incur a tax penalty.

The results have been remarkable. After a year, 97.4 per cent of Massachusetts residents had coverage, and the remaining gap continues to close. Despite the requirement that individuals buy insurance and that employers either provide coverage or pay a tax, the program has remained extremely popular. Repeated surveys have found that at least two-thirds of the state's residents support the reform.



The Massachusetts plan didn't do anything about medical costs, however, and, with layoffs accelerating, more people require subsidized care than the state predicted. Insurance premiums continue to rise here, just as they do elsewhere in the country. Many residents also complain that eight per cent of their income is too much to pay for health insurance, even though, on average, premiums amount to twice that much. The experience has shown national policymakers that they will have to be serious about reducing costs.

For all that, the majority of state residents would not go back to the old system. I'm among them. For years, about one in ten of my patients—I specialize in cancer surgery—had no insurance. Even though I'd waive my fee, they struggled to pay for their tests, medications, and hospital stay.

I once took care of a nineteen-year-old college student who had maxed out her insurance coverage. She had a treatable but metastatic cancer. But neither she nor her parents could afford the radiation therapy that she required. I made calls to find state programs, charities—anything that could help her—to no avail. She put off the treatment for almost a year because she didn't want to force her parents to take out a second mortgage on their home. But eventually they had to choose between their daughter and their life's savings.

For the past year, I haven't had a single Massachusetts patient who has had to ask how much the necessary tests will cost; not one who has told me he needed to put off his cancer operation until he found a job that provided insurance coverage. And that's a remarkable change: a glimpse of American health care without the routine cruelty.

It will be no utopia. People will still face co-payments and premiums. There may still be agonizing disputes over coverage for non-standard treatments. Whatever the system's contours, we will still find it exasperating, even disappointing. We're not going to get perfection. But we can have transformation—which is to say, a health-care system that works. And there are ways to get there that start from where we are. ♦

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MOUSE AU VIN

BY NOAH BAUMBACH

> Red wine may be much more potent than was thought in extending human lifespan, researchers say in a new report that is likely to give impetus to the rapidly growing search for longevity drugs. The study is based on dosing mice with resveratrol, an ingredient of some red wines. . . . [In a related study] scientists used a dose on mice equivalent to just 35 bottles a day.
>
> —*The Times.*

August 24, 2008

I uncork a 2003 Haut-Médoc, which has a delightfully oaky nose, and pour a glass for myself and a bowl for my subject, Louis, the gray-and-white mouse I've selected for this study. I've chosen him for his serious and restrained demeanor—among the other rodents, he keeps to himself. Cautious by nature, he sniffs the wine apprehensively, but after a sip or two he laps it up eagerly.

The Château La Croix opens up in the glass, developing a full body and a luscious texture, and really hits its stride by the sixteenth bottle. Once we get a good head on, Louis is able to do the treadmill for twice his normal length of time and I do a pretty solid forward roll.

August 25th

Late start today. I don't wake until after ten. (And that's only because the phone clangs like an air-raid siren. Debra wondering where I was last night.) Louis moans in his cage until eleven-thirty. A 1998 Saint-Émilion helps ease the crippling sensation of blood poisoning. A little hair of the dog. Try to jot some observations from last night, but, really, after I started dialling ex-girlfriends it's all a black hole.

Louis again shows an abundance of energy, however; he must've taken the wrong turn in the maze about eight times in a row before he realized the cheese was to the left. Once he gets it, he collapses in a pool of laughter and urine. And then I collapse in a pool of laughter and urine.

September 3rd

Louis is characteristically reserved and a bit testy before we get going, but after eight or nine glasses he's back to his jocular self. He even makes some astute comments about the 2005 Pomerol's peppery herbaceous finish. This is a terrible thing to say, but I like Louis better when he drinks.

After eleven bottles, Louis shows unbelievable muscular progress. He can lift my left foot and, according to the rabbit, he arm-wrestled the monkey to a draw. (I must have been dialling ex-girlfriends around this time.) I do what might generously be called a cartwheel but really is just me losing my balance. I fall and smash into a cabinet of borosilicate glasses.

ISTVAN BANYAI

The mice in the control group get the usual bowl of water and are asleep by nine-thirty. Louis and I don't crash until four, following a spirited argument about free will and half of "Norbit" on Starz.

September 24th

I call my wife and tell her I'm going to sleep at the lab. She reminds me that she left me a week ago. Louis tries to crack me up by pantomiming humping a chimp through the cage. I hang up and Louis high-fives me: "We're good to go, bro!"

Louis runs a half-marathon on the treadmill, then vomits into my decanter. I do a handstand.

September 27th

Last thing I remember is doing a handstand three days ago. That's O.K. But I wouldn't have minded if someone had moved me from the floor to a mattress. Or at least cleaned up the blood. Louis is staring at me. "You said some weird shit," he declares.

Louis is excited: he's heard of a study with endocannabinoids and THC as an anti-inflammatory. He suggests that if we're going to live forever we ought to have soft skin. I explain to him that we'd need to apply for a grant, which could take months, and, with the headache I've got, I really don't feel up to the paperwork. Louis suggests that we just score some weed at the record store.

October 10th

I look great! Louis looks great! Louis says I look thirty-seven. Louis is a year and a half and looks eight months. I thought Louis was me today. Mice are so weird. They're like humans in rodent costumes.

October 28th

It should be mentioned that Louis can now lift the cat. I can lift Louis. I could do that before, but now he's more muscular, so it's actually impressive. Do you follow?

After we smoke a bowl, I unscrew a 2008 Ralph's generic-brand red. It has a sugary vinegar nose and a vinegary, sugary, vomity biley taste, but after five bottles who gives a shit? Louis wonders aloud if resveratrol might also be found in tequila, Jägermeister, and cocaine. I have to dip a little further into the grant money, but we're able to score some blow by the side of the highway. Once we get back to the lab, we discover it's baking soda. Louis wants to hunt down the guy and murder him. It takes me, the monkey, and the entire control group of mice to restrain him. Fortunately, the hookers arrive and all is forgotten.

December 18th

A touch of *vin triste* today as we realize that the final mouse in the control group has passed on. Louis tore the little fellow's head off in a paranoid rage. Thirty-five bottles of red followed by crystal meth seems to have diminishing returns. Or so says the rabbit.

January 5, 2009

Where has all the grant money gone? We need cash, damn it! I can't give any more blood, that's for sure. . . . I get Louis a job down the hall testing the effects of loud rock music on hearing, but he fails the piss test. And I'd told him to take the rat's urine.

Then he's all in my face, like, "You think you rule the world, I do everything to please you, run the treadmill" bullshit, and I'm, like, "You should shut your fucking face, you fucking mouse animal rodent . . ."

Our first fistfight.

January 24th

i love louis i wrote a song about how much i love him it goes

louis louis louis,
mon petit souris

souris means louis in france i sing him my song and he cries and i pet him and we are happy and we drink wine

March 4th

need to write more better journal writing

June 9, 2077

Louis is seventy today, which must make me three hundred and nine. The mouse and I share a laugh over a slice of Cheddar, thinking back to the old days. Oh, we had some times! This was before they found resveratrol in lettuce and way before the monkey and the rabbit staged an intervention. Louis and I were so mad at them then, but all is forgiven. . . .

Louis looks great for his age. Except for a distinguished salt and pepper along his chin and rear end, he doesn't look older than seventeen.

It's funny. I was just remarking to Louis that I can't even remember what life was like before the mice took over. He laughs and chucks a cracker into my cage. ♦

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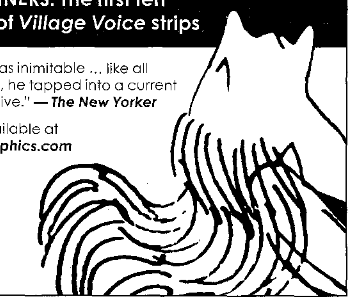
JULES FEIFFER
EXPLAINERS: The first ten years of *Village Voice* strips

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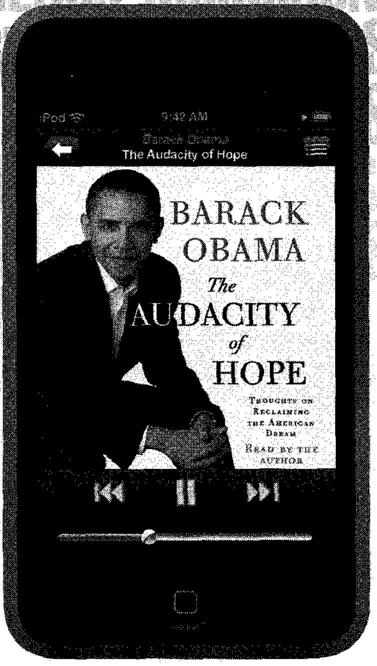

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ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

BALANCHINE SAID

What was the source of the choreographer's celebrated utterances?

BY ARLENE CROCE

Balanchine was much quoted. He had a typically Russian penchant for philosophizing and a verbal wit that, in his unpolished English, came off as folk wisdom. When he stopped his class to talk or when he gave an interview, he always had something to say that people remembered, and he left the impression that these rough-hewn nuggets of his were as spontaneous as they were abundant. ("By George Balanchine," a booklet of quotations, was published in 1984, the year after he died.) He could be practical ("My muse must come to me on union time"), peremptory ("There are no mothers-in-law in ballet"), or cryptic ("I am not a man, but a cloud in trousers"). The one thing he did not care to be was original. Many of Balanchine's most memorable sayings were quotations, produced from a storehouse of sources: Pushkin, Goethe, Shakespeare, the Bible, the Greek Fathers, Abraham Lincoln, Paul Valéry. The range gives some indication of Balanchine's erudition, especially remarkable for a dancer. He was not a reader, like his good friends Stravinsky and Tchelitchev—his schedule did not leave much time for reading—but then he was not the kind of person who needed to read in order to absorb information. As a student in Petrograd before and just after the revolutions of 1917, he fed his curiosity on the richness of Russian culture and thrived on its assimilation of commonly disdained arts, such as dance, film, and the circus. Without this background and the subsequent involvement with the Monte Carlo-based Ballets Russes of Serge Diaghilev, not even a dancer of genius could have picked up as much as Balanchine already had by 1928, when, at the age of twenty-four, he choreographed "Apollo" for Diaghilev.

Balanchine's quotations were usually delivered to the best of his memory in his own words. Sometimes he varied the wording intentionally; at other times, he quoted verbatim. "A cloud in trousers" is straight from Mayakovsky:

> If you really want
> I'll be irreproachably sweet:
> not a man but a cloud in trousers.

Balanchine told Solomon Volkov, one of his biographers, that he used this line to impress girls—just what Mayakovsky said about it. But Balanchine would also refer to himself in interviews as a cloud in trousers, by which I think he meant that he was a ballet-maker, a creator of airy ephemera.

"My muse must come to me on union time" is a variation on Tchaikovsky's "My muse must come to me when I call her." The motto of the poet Vyacheslav Ivanov, "*A realibus ad realiora*" ("From the real to the more real"), was revised by Balanchine to describe his job: "To make the beautiful more beautiful." (Ivanov's motto as it stands could also have been Balanchine's.) His well-known advice to the mentally agitated dancer, "Don't think, dear, do," comes from Valéry's poem "Ébauche d'un Serpent": "*Danse, cher corps. . . . Ne pense pas!*" One of the most celebrated Balanchinisms, "God creates, man assembles," is an adaptation of a saying attributed to Glinka, "Nations create music, composers only arrange it," and it is a question whether Balanchine or Stravinsky said it first. The word "assemble" is a synonym for "compose," which literally means "put together." Balanchine was speaking not only for composers and choreographers but for all "creative" human beings. We put things together that already exist; we cannot create out of nothing—only God creates ex nihilo. It is the thought expressed in John 1:3: "Without Him was made nothing that has been made."

In countless interviews, Balanchine deplored the tendency of some members of the audience to attach meanings to dance gesture, and he always used the same metaphor:

> When you have a garden full of pretty flowers, you don't demand of them, "What do you mean? What is your significance?"

> Dancers are just flowers, and flowers grow without any literal meaning, they are just beautiful.
>
> We're like flowers. A flower doesn't tell you a story. *It's in itself a beautiful thing.*

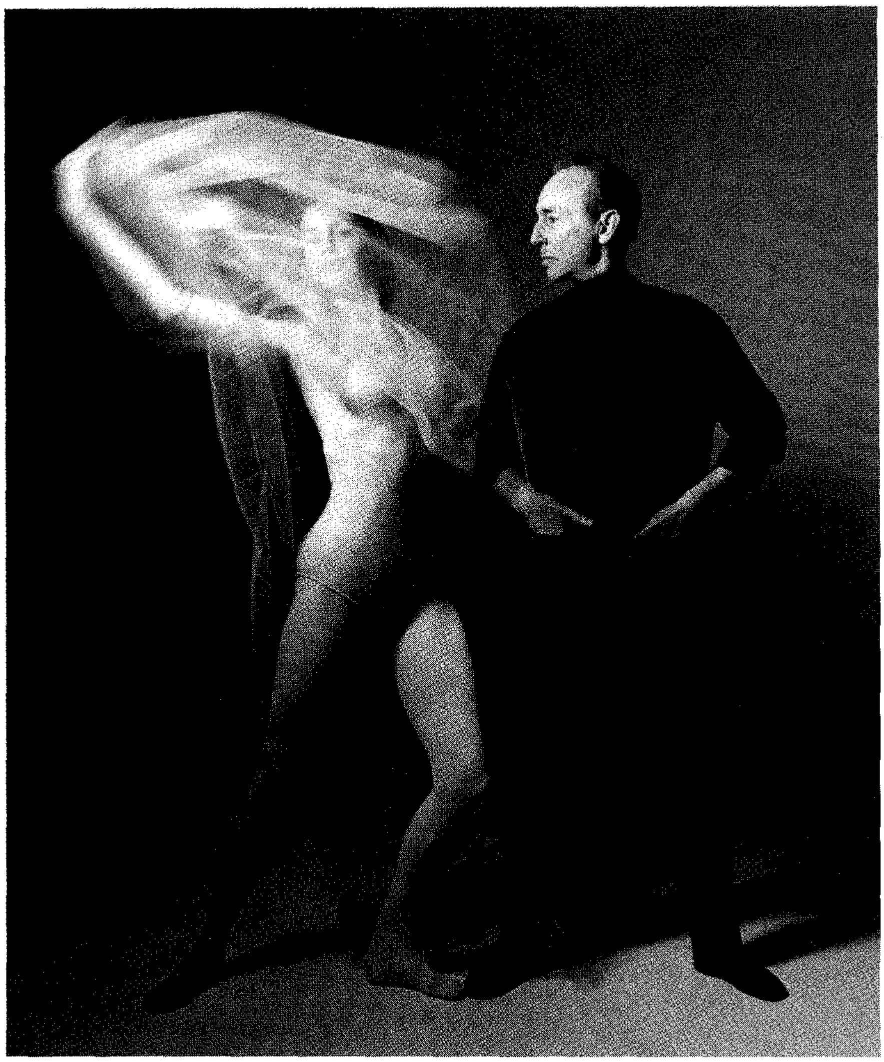
These statements were all loose renderings of the Acmeist manifesto, one of the prime documents of Russian symbolist poetry. The Acmeist poets rebelled against the previous generation's use of prepackaged symbolism. Their case was forcefully put by Sergei Gorodetsky in the January, 1913, issue of the St. Petersburg arts journal *Apollón:* "For the Acmeists, a rose has again become beautiful in itself, for its petals, fragrance, and color, and not for its purported likeness to mystical love or something else."

In the sixties, a critical line of attack on Balanchine was his supposed preference for dancers of one physical type, tall and long-legged, with small heads. Balanchine rejected the charge with a comparison of his company to a pipe organ: just as the different-sized pipes of the organ produce voices driven by the same wind, bodies of many different sizes and types dance in the same style. Here he undoubtedly had in mind Jakob Böhme's mystical image of God's Creation as a pipe organ. (Böhme, the seventeenth-century German theosophist, had an enormous impact on Russian literature and philosophy.)

Naturally, Balanchine stole his jokes. Once, having to enter the women's dressing room in a hurry, he burst in shouting, "Don't look, I'm coming!"—a switch on Beatrice Lillie's "Shut your eyes, boys, I'm coming through!" When I complimented him on his funny curtain speeches (toasting the late Igor Stravinsky: "In Russia, we drink the health of the guy that died"; accepting the Handel Medallion, "I can't Handel it . . . so I'll Haydn it"), he shrugged diffidently and said, "I tell Jewish jokes," a laugh line if I ever heard one.

Balanchine's followers have taken to repeating his sayings as if they were "The Golden Verses of Pythagoras" (which some of them may well be), invariably incorporating the Master's twitch, his twang, and his habit of starting sentences with "You know, dear . . ." Almost every line is Balanchine quoting someone else. This is not to say that he never had an original thought. "Ballet is Woman" is pure Balanchine. "There are no mothers-in-law in ballet" is his pronouncement upon relationships that cannot be expressed in dance terms; he called it "Balanchine's Law." One of his most publicized utterances, "See the music, hear the dance," is arguably rightfully his, however platitudinous it may have become by the time he revived it. At least he was quoting a published response to his own choreography. Glenway Wescott, reviewing Bernard Taper's "Balanchine" in the magazine *Show* (December, 1963), had written, "Suddenly I *see* the music; suddenly I *hear* the movements of the dancers."

As an interviewee, Balanchine had his preferred subjects. His pet peeve in the theatre was the kind of emotionalism that aims at exciting false empathy in the spectator—the opposite of classical art. Even more did he detest the demand for it: "A lot of people go to the theatre to see their own life, their own experience. We don't give them that in the ballet. We give them something less. When you see flowers, do you have any emotion? You're moved by the color and the beauty—but what does it mean to be moved?" In his later, crankier interviews, he answered his own question. In whining tones, he would mock the spectator who goes to the theatre to cry over his own life: "I'm married, my wife and children have left me, and I'm unhappy and feel that I'm going to kill myself. And that's what I think Art is—people should play for me my story."



George Balanchine with Suzanne Farrell: "My muse must come to me on union time."

BERT STERN/CONDÉ NAST ARCHIVE

For this, his freest extrapolation from a quoted source, Balanchine actually named an author—Hegel. However, it's not Hegel's point about the sublimity of Greek tragedy that he wants to pass on, nor is it seriously a complaint about bathos in the theatre; it's his own personal detestation of self-pity. (He sounds like someone proud of overcoming that weakness in himself.) No doubt his interviewer, Jonathan Cott, would have been treated to the same dramatic spiel had Balanchine cited, instead of Hegel, the elegantly succinct paraphrase of Hegel which Coleridge applied to French tragedy: “The soul is not stupefied into mere sensations by a worthless sympathy with our own ordinary sufferings.” Coleridge was no attributor of sources, either. On the other hand, Hegel was no aphorist. Balanchine, who was much more familiar with German than with English literature, might well have been pleased by what the English poet did to the long-winded German. He performed much the same kind of operation on “Swan Lake.” And he did it on principle.

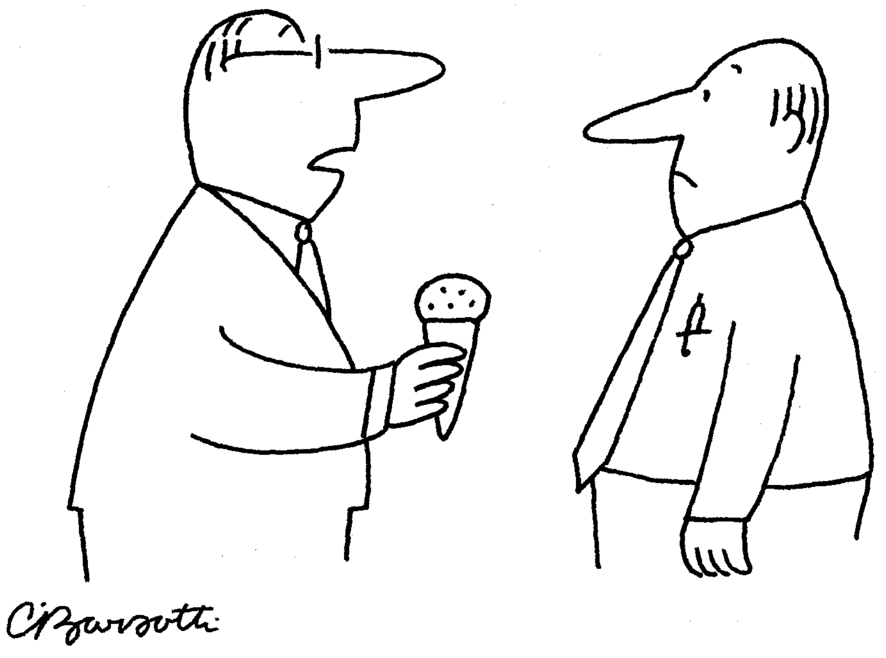
For Balanchine, art was not something created de novo. The same with quotations. If Tchaikovsky summoning the Muse turned out to be quoting Pushkin, this only fortified Balanchine in his conviction that the search for an original inspiration is futile. Inspiration takes place in a kind of infinite regress. In “See the music, hear the dance,” he was quoting a contemporary voicing of an ancient idea. The earliest injunction to “hear the dance” is in the dialogues of the second-century Greek writer Lucian, and even then Lucian was quoting. (But he claimed that his source was the Delphic Oracle, beyond whose authority it is impossible to go.)

The sayings of Balanchine, the quotes within quotes and echoes upon echoes, were in line with one of his great themes as a choreographer, the legacy of classicism. Once a firebrand of the avant-garde, he returned to the classical tradition before he was out of his thirties. In later years, he waged a personal campaign against the twentieth-century fetish of originality. He subscribed to the Hegelian view of history as a spiral: everything recurs, but in a different form. Not only dance movement but all art, even the most novel-seeming, is a version of something that has already been said or done. For this reason, he saw no harm in appropriating; he stole and was stolen from—that was the way of art. As he told Volkov, “If you like something of someone else’s, why not take it? The important thing is that it seem natural and fit in.” With Stravinsky, he shared a firm belief in the labor of art as perpetual renovation: Stravinsky, who liked to quote Goethe—“Everything has been thought of before; the task is to think of it again.”

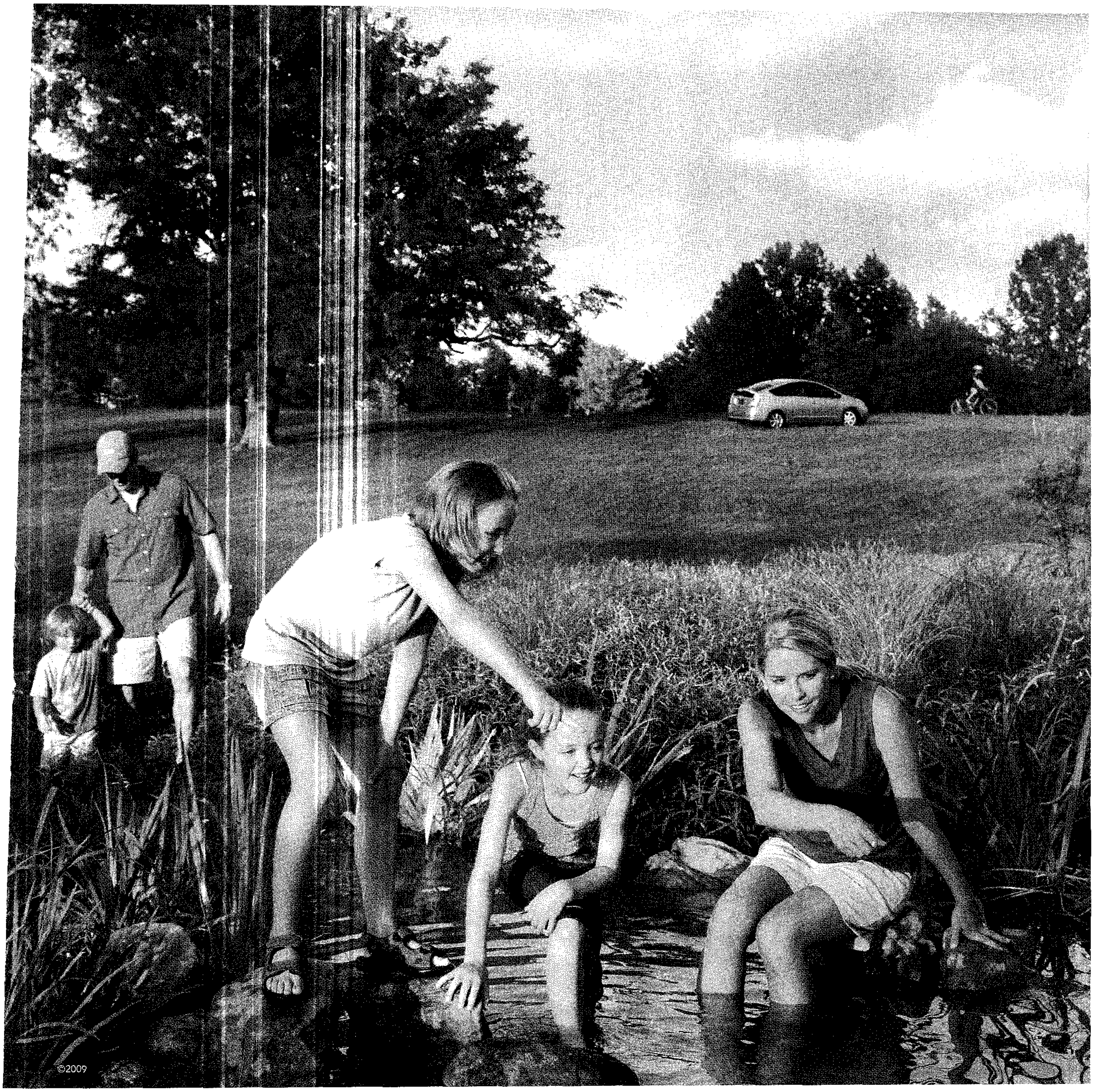
To think of it again: this is the specific task of the choreographer. It means imagining a nonexistent past, resummoning the energies of previous choreographers whose dances have decayed or disappeared from memory. Balanchine assigned himself to rethink Petipa, because Petipa represented the sum of theoretical knowledge up to the end of the nineteenth century. (One does not literally reconstruct the old dances; one reactivates the theory behind them.) Petipa, too, was more than a choreographer; he was a tradition. One of the great Balanchine statements is a definition of what tradition means to the artist. Seemingly distilled from his own experience, it could equally well be an idea that he inherited directly from his predecessors in ballet. It is in fact the *idea* of predecessors: “You must go through tradition, absorb it, and become in a way a reincarnation of all the artistic periods that have come before you.” I thought I recognized in this arresting quote a digest of T. S. Eliot’s “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” repeatedly cited by Lincoln Kirstein as a seminal influence on his work with Balanchine. In that classic essay, Eliot writes, “The historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.” As Balanchine used to say, “We all live in the same time forever. There is no future and there is no past.”

And then, in Oliver Sacks’s book “Uncle Tungsten,” I came across a statement by the nineteenth-century Italian chemist Stanislao Cannizzaro that is an almost exact parallel to Balanchine’s: “It often happens that the mind of a person who is learning a new science has to pass through all the phases which the science itself has exhibited in its historical evolution.” Speaking as a dancer whose science was in his body, Balanchine added the word “reincarnation.”

Well, we know that when Balanchine did pick up a book it was almost always popular science, the kind written by distinguished physicists such as Fred Hoyle and George Gamow. Still, the sense of déjà vu is unsettling. If Balanchine the artist was never as larcenous as Balanchine the sage, in his own mind he was always bringing the past to life, existing in the “simultaneous order” of art, teaching and choreographing every day in the company of Mozart and Tchaikovsky, Bach and Mendelssohn, Petipa and Saint-Léon. As a quotationist, he frequently succeeded in obliterating the “originator” of the quote, and in this, too, he had precedents. Julius Caesar’s words on crossing the Rubicon, “The die is cast,” were taken from a play by Menander, and the glorious closing line of the Divine Comedy, “The love that moves the sun and the other stars,” is by Dante out of Boëthius from Aristotle. Mr. B.’s sense of reliving the past was analogous to his practice of quoting other men’s sayings or speaking their thoughts in his own words. He recycled verbal nuggets in the same spirit in which he revivified the art of ballet. ♦



“Pistachio almond—that’s the buyout.”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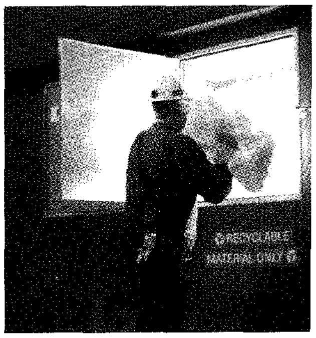
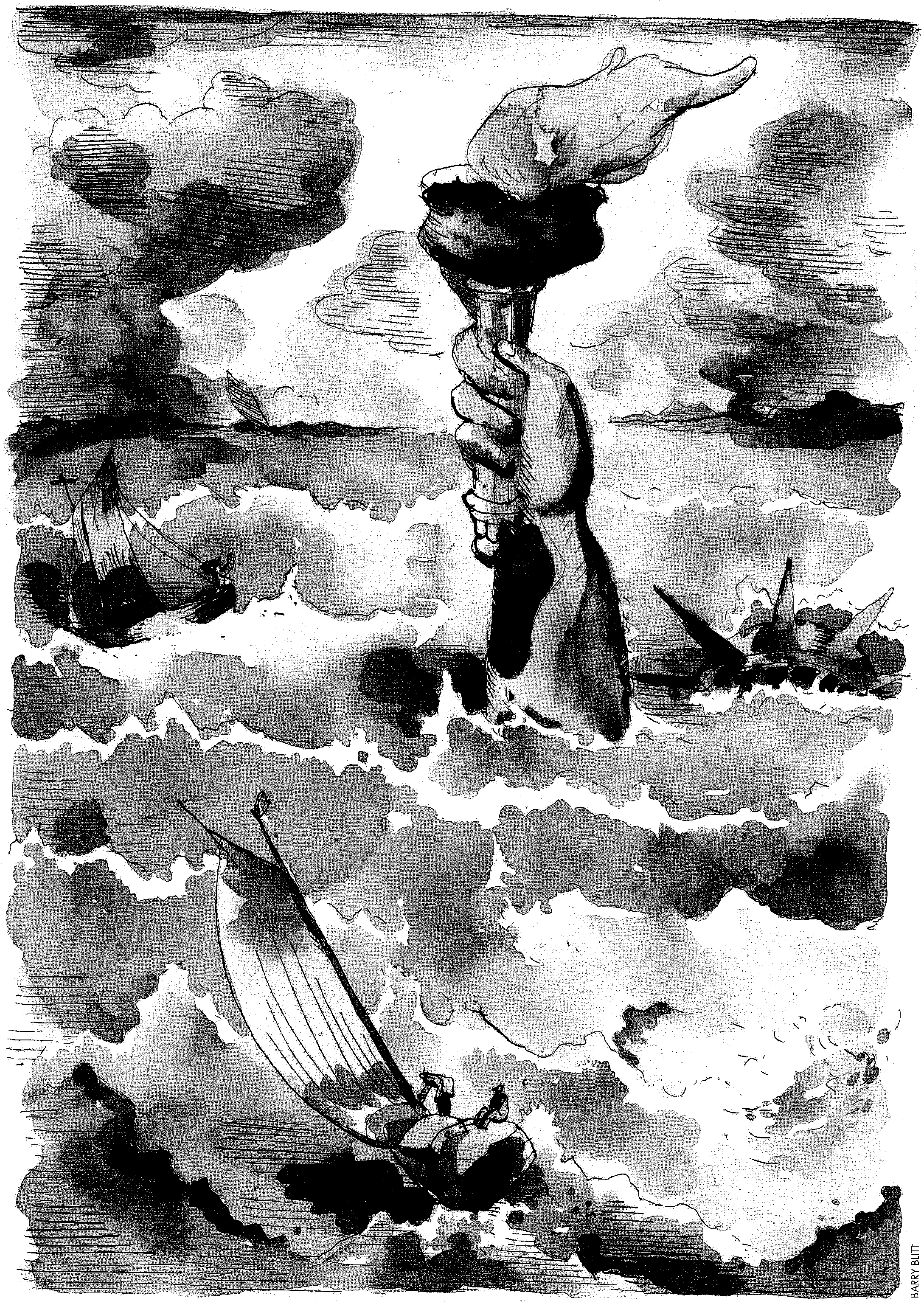




BARRY BLITT

AMERICAN CHRONICLES

THE DYSTOPIANS

Bad times are boom times for some.

BY BEN McGRATH

A year and a half ago, with real-estate prices falling, Dmitry Orlov, a forty-six-year-old software engineer from Leningrad, sold his apartment in the Brighton section of Boston, along with most of its contents, and bought a sailboat—an old sharpie made from Douglas-fir marine plywood, on which he and his wife, Natasha, a literary translator, now live, debt-free. They rent a slip at the Constitution Marina, near the Boston Naval Shipyard, and he walks to work at a nearby advertising agency. For errands, Orlov rides a bicycle, which he sometimes parks on deck. It's been a long time since he owned either a car or a television ("When I'm in front of one for five minutes, I think it's lying to me and I want to take wire cutters and clip the power cord"). He has outfitted the boat, which is named Hogfish, with solar panels and six months' worth of propane, and figures he can store an equivalent supply of rice and beans down below. "It's basically a survival capsule," he said recently.

Orlov moved to the United States when he was twelve, and returned to the Soviet Union for the first time in 1989, shortly after his uncle, a political prisoner under the Andropov regime, was released. During his second trip back, in 1990, the country was suffering from a fuel shortage, and he financed a road trip to the medieval towns of Pskov and Novgorod with a trunk full of vodka, trading half-litre bottles for ten litres of gasoline from black-marketeers along the way. (This was just after Gorbachev's anti-alcoholism campaign, and Orlov capitalized on a death in the family by redeeming a funeral's worth of vodka coupons.) The only comparable resource seemed to be bluejeans, of which he'd brought only one pair. No one wanted rubles. He internalized the lesson for future reference: "When faced with a collapsing economy, one should stop thinking of wealth in terms of money."

Over the course of several visits, Orlov observed the social effects of the Soviet breakdown and concluded that there were some peculiar advantages to his home country's dysfunctionality. Bloated bureaucracies move slowly, and are therefore slow to die. Long breadlines force people to consider backup plans, like kitchen gardens. Orlov's 2008 book, "Reinventing Collapse: The Soviet Example and American Prospects," identifies the ingredients of what he calls "superpower collapse soup"—a severe shortfall in the production of crude oil, a worsening foreign-trade deficit, an oversized military budget, and crippling foreign debt—and argues that his adopted country, with its "American-style Potemkin villages" and "highly compensated senior lunch-eaters," is not only vulnerable but likely to fare worse. ("Make no mistake about it: this soup will be served, and it will not be tasty!") "Now we're in hospice care," he told me. "The bailouts you see can be viewed as ever bigger doses of morphine for a patient that's not long for this world."

In 2006, Orlov published an online manifesto, "The New Age of Sail," in which he extolled the virtues of what might be called bourgeois survivalism. "She must look like a proper yacht, and not a shanty boat or a barge, because she must give coastal property owners no reason to complain to the harbormaster about the ugly thing spoiling their precious view," he wrote. "She should give the impression that she is sailed by people of obvious quality and distinction, of the sort that snooty coastal property owners might want to invite over for gin-and-tonics and to catch up on the goings on in San Tropez." Life on a boat has the additional benefit, he wrote, of providing "isometric exercise similar to a Pilates workout," because of the constant jostling of the sea. "People who live aboard are rarely overweight."

Hogfish, whose hull is trimmed red and gray, looks the bourgeois part; aside from the solar panels and bicycles, it is indistinguishable from the weekend yachts cruising in and out of Boston Harbor throughout the warmer months. Regarding the domestic considerations of the transition to aquatic sustainability, Orlov said, "I think my wife is very realistic, but I can't say that she's all that in favor of it. We're doing it in stages." For now, he keeps a ten-horsepower Yamaha outboard motor handy, in case of emergency or faint breeze, and just before Thanksgiving he installed an on-demand hot-water system to take the bite out of a coastal New England winter. He plans, meanwhile, to establish a trading network along Lake Champlain for transporting Vermont apples and maple syrup to farmers' markets in New York City, and hopes to be able to undercut diesel trucks on price when the oil market resumes its upward swing. "We don't have a long wait before sail-based transport is the only option," he said, anticipating more dire environmental conditions. (From the manifesto: "In the future, I expect coastal property owners to get downright excited when they see any sailboat, whether it looks fashionable or not, paddle out their leaky canoes, and try to barter jewelry, silver cutlery or pretty seashells for the things they desperately need.") Should the trading not suffice, and the need to raise chickens arise, they'll set sail and relocate to a more rural base of operations, where Hogfish, which has a flat bottom, can double as a trailer home.

Until recently, Orlov identified the

A doomer: "That's the exciting thing about collapse—the breaking down of barriers and definitions that just don't work anymore."

readers of his book, and of a blog that he maintains, Club Orlov, as belonging to three basic cultural categories: "back-to-the-land types," united in their opposition to industrial agriculture; "peak oilers," who worry about the shock effects on energy markets of reaching the maximum global crude-extraction rate; and all-around Cassandras, or "people who sometimes derisively are called doomers." (The doomers are currently enjoying a little less derision, which is a mixed blessing, because it is axiomatic among true believers that mainstream respect means that it is too late for anything to be done.) But in the past few months, judging from the e-mails he receives, Orlov has acquired a fourth audience, composed of financial professionals, who have been, as he said, "bolstering my gut feeling that the United States is bankrupt." A number of them have placed orders for multiple copies of his book, and he took some pleasure in imagining them passing it on to their friends and families this past holiday season as a grim kind of stocking stuffer.

One of Orlov's greatest fans is the author James Howard Kunstler, whose 1993 book about suburban sprawl, "The Geography of Nowhere," is a staple of collegiate urban-studies curricula, and whose weekly blog column, Clusterfuck Nation, can be read as a sustained critique of the cheerful globalism championed by Thomas Friedman. His latest contribution to the doomersphere is an engaging novel, "World Made by Hand," set in the post-collapse future, and while it's not apocalyptic by the standards of, say, Cormac McCarthy's "The Road," it is comprehensive in its imagination of the disasters that await us: dirty bombs and race wars and dengue fever and flu epidemics and forced shavings by religious fanatics and hurricanes in New England in June. (Kunstler resists the doomer label—"I've never been a complete collapsitarian," he says—but the fact that one of his bombs detonates in Washington on "twelve twenty-one" is likely to please superstitious adherents of the Maya calendar, which concludes its first cycle on what is now the Internet's most popular day of reckoning: December 21, 2012.) "World Made by Hand" is set in a small town north of Albany, where the residents have no oil, no coffee, no spices, no mail delivery, and only sporadic electricity, but marijuana cultivation is booming and they're growing "buds the size of plums." Capitalism and human ingenuity persist; it's only the economic incentives that change. "The action is going to be in smaller towns in the years ahead, because the cities are going to be so problematic," he told me.

Kunstler likes to say that the United States has "a railroad system that the Bulgarians would be ashamed of," and when I proposed visiting him last fall in Saratoga Springs, where he lives, he advised against taking the train. Hudson River foliage in October struck me as one of those things that, like vodka and pot, retain their appeal even in a dismal fiscal cycle, so I bought an Amtrak ticket. Sure enough, about midway up the line, the train came to an unplanned stop, and did not resume forward progress for more than a half hour, during which the conductor befriended the family sitting in front of me—a father and his two young daughters, from Vermont. Theirs was an unlikely, if fitting, alliance between economic populism and nouveau hippiedom. "There go the stockbrokers," the conductor said, as a southbound passenger train whizzed by on the left. "As long as they're on the train they can't be spending your money." Meanwhile, the father, whose hair was long and braided, pointed out the window at a speedboat on the river and said, "Look at him, wasting gasoline." They might both have sympathized with Orlov. The family, it turned out, was planning to stop in Saratoga Springs for lunch, and they grew louder as the wait persisted. Finally, after we'd started moving again, the conductor made an announcement: "Albany is next. That'll occur in twenty minutes. Of course, based on past performance, who knows?" I got off in Albany and rented a car.

GRAD-SCHOOL PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE
Barbara is very mature for a 28-year-old.
And she certainly isn't drinking as much as she used to!

Kunstler showed up at my hotel

"Mrs. Pepperkorn and her cat made many contributions to the museum."

wearing jeans and a bright-red vest over a flannel shirt, with a small hoop in his left ear. He is bald, with a neatly trimmed gray mustache, and walks with a bounding theatricality, perhaps owing as much to his thespian days at SUNY-Brockport, in the late sixties, as to the overwhelming correctness of his warning, back in 2005, about a "worldwide pyramid racket" involving subprime mortgages and what he later called "incomprehensibly abstract mutant financial 'products,'" such as derivatives and credit default swaps. He was also carrying a long umbrella (the forecast was partly cloudy), which he used to prevent me from crossing the street in front of a car that didn't appear to be slowing down. "Fuck you, asshole!" he yelled at the driver, an unwitting enemy combatant in the new class warfare (transportation division) that Kunstler believes will soon have Lindsay Lohan and Paris Hilton hiding from more than just the paparazzi. Shortly after we turned left onto Broadway, the town's main commercial stretch, Kunstler ran into a couple of acquaintances, a local real-estate developer and the owner of an art gallery that had just shuttered, eating lunch at an outdoor café. "Your vision is coming true, only through the back door," the developer said, presumably referring to the fact that gas prices—Kunstler is a prominent peak oiler—did not seem to be the catalyst of the current upheaval.

"I'd say an emergency meeting of the G7 is pretty much the front entrance," Kunstler said. "Although who would have thought Iceland would be the first to go?"

Kunstler saw degeneracy everywhere. Stopping in a pharmacy to drop off a prescription for sleeping pills, he was nearly bowled over in a narrow aisle by a heavyset woman, and remarked, "Our fellow-Americans just don't look that healthy." The tattooed arms of a young man standing next to a young woman at a crosswalk qualified him as a "bad boyfriend." (The proliferation of tattoos, Kunstler has written, is "a symptom of the growing barbarism in American life," and the fact that tattoo parlors now rent space on main thoroughfares, like Saratoga Springs' Broadway, rather than in back alleys, is "a harbinger of social dysfunction.") Kunstler showed me a motel at the corner of Broadway and Division Street, near the outdoor café, that he considered "the most low-quality Western-civilization architecture conceivable." Its name was the Downtowner, although its appearance suggested a Roadsider. "Look at the details," he said. "Look at those stupid mangy little shutters and those horrible windows, and the horrible steel railings and those ridiculous pilasters. Everything about it is just so cheap. And the thing that amazes me is that this is the stuff that we built in the most confident and flush period of our history, in the sixties, when, you know, we were basically ruling the world!" Farther along, we came across a faux-Georgian bank, which he said was "basically fabricated out of the cheapest shit you could possibly get, stuck onto a brick box. Except it's not *even* a brick box. It's an aluminum-frame box with a brick veneer, meant to visually get across a cartoon idea that this is a plantation house, and therefore a dignified building—you know, with a dignified activity, *banking*, going on." Hard as it may be to believe, Saratoga Springs rates comparatively well in Kunstler's assessment of America's built environments.

The architectural criticism was inextricably linked to our national predicament, because in Kunstler's view the American economy since the Second World War has essentially been one of continuous sprawl-building, made possible by cheap (but diminishing) energy sources, and, given what we've built, it amounts to "the greatest misallocation of resources in the history of the world." As long-term infrastructure, McMansion subdivisions and the big-box retailers that service them are only worth the scraps that can be salvaged by scavenging, he contends, and when oil stops allowing people to indulge the current fantasy, Bergen and Fairfield Counties will become Hobbesian slums, highway strip malls will be recolonized by sumac trees, and the hulking sheds formerly known as Kmarts will be good for little more than Pentecostal roller rinks. (Economic collapse bodes well for fundamentalism, as people seek holistic explanations for the wipeout of their savings.)

"We make so many assumptions about the things that we know necessarily continuing to function the way they are now," he said. "I find that hilarious." Take skyscrapers: their efficiencies may become nightmares in a blackout, as the elevators stop working. And when natural-gas reserves are depleted to levels at which pressure falters, the pipes will freeze and burst, the halls will flood, and offices and apartments will become instantly uninhabitable. Large cities will then need to decompress almost overnight, and reconcentrate along their waterways, which offer both potential power sources and shipping routes. The industrial zoning of riverfronts and canals was not an unfortunate accident. Or, put another way, the Gowanus Canal is a model of sustainable urbanism. Goodbye, greenways.

That morning, on his blog, Kunstler had mentioned Nassim Nicholas Taleb's best-selling book "The Black Swan," about the inevitability of unforeseeable events, and now he elaborated. "We don't really know how collapse proceeds," he said. "We have reason to believe that it can happen pretty rapidly and comprehensibly, in ways that we'd find shocking and unbelievable until it happens. We're in the middle of one right now. I mean, you and I are walking happily down a little alley in a small town, but really around us all kinds of stuff is in dire trouble—you know, banks in dozens of countries, people in Iceland are hoarding food. Three weeks ago, none of the people in Reykjavík thought, Oh, on October 13th our currency will be worthless."

Triumphant pessimism can be fun, and Kunstler certainly will not be sad to see Patio Man, David Brooks's archetype of the exurbs, abandon his Weber Genesis for a life of Dumpster diving. As we walked around town, Kunstler continued to spot people he knew, which gave him ample opportunity to shout "Dude!" and "Get out!" and "Word up!" in mock surprise. (Irony, hipness, and adolescence itself are distant memories in a world made by hand.) Far from the image of the stereotypical Chicken Little as a maladjusted hermit, he was more like an amiable town crier whom the citizenry regarded fondly, if a bit skeptically. "You expecting rain?" one of his friends asked, noticing the umbrella.

Our route took us past the stables next to the racetrack, where the annual yearling auction is held. They had been abandoned for the off-season, but it was easy to imagine them serving a less fanciful, year-round purpose with the return of animal labor, another Kunstlerian forecast. Nearby, the large Second Empire and Queen Anne-style houses of the East Side Historic District, formerly run down by a transient college population ("Kids are living there and smoking bongs, and cats are peeing in the corners," as Kunstler put it), looked mostly renovated, thanks in part to speculating Wall Streeters who'd been drawn upstate by the races during the bull market. "Whatever Morgan Stanley smoothie bought this one, he's got an extra thirty-six thousand dollars sloshing around in his pocket, saying, 'Oh, it'd be so nice to have a little masonry fantasia on the lawn,'" Kunstler said, noting an unfinished stone wall in someone's front yard—now a fossil of gentrification. "We can't predict how households are going to be organized. One possibility is you'll be renting out rooms to boarders. Another possibility is that there are so many unemployed people they actually start working as servants again." Echoing Mark Twain, Kunstler sometimes says that history doesn't exactly repeat itself, but it rhymes.

Kunstler once had a "very grand house" in this neighborhood, before the breakup of his third marriage, in 2004, in the midst of the real-estate bubble. He didn't have the will to buy another. He rents his current home, which is by his own estimation an "embarrassing" raised ranch with vinyl siding. It sits on ten wooded acres on the edge of town and offers plentiful firewood, but its remoteness leaves him vulnerable to bandits as the social contract breaks down and police forces, working with reduced budgets, become more thinly stretched. (In a recent blog post titled "Easthampton Burning?" he described a new class of "millions of Joe-the-Plumber types" who will soon have lost their jobs and been reduced to hunching over "in their tent cities, in the rain, sipping amateur-brand raisin wine bartered for a few snared rock doves. How long before the hardier ones among them venture out to Easthampton with long knives and matches?") He keeps a sixteen-gauge shotgun in the closet, and he recently applied for a pistol permit.

As it happened, not only did it not rain while Kunstler and I were walking around Saratoga Springs but the Dow Jones gained nine hundred and thirty-six points. "What does the headline say? 'ECONOMY FIXED'?" Kunstler asked, eying my complimentary *USA Today*, when we met for breakfast the next morning. (It read "BIGGEST BOUNCE EVER.") He declared the rally a "dead cat's bounce," and repeated a joke that he'd made the day before, involving orders from the Treasury Secretary, Henry Paulson, to his underlings, to "buy the Dow," in order to stave off consumer panic. "Let's say that lending is reëstablished," he said. "What for? For

FIRST IDYLL

A frayed rope of ivy wound round and round the lip
of a cup, a wooden cup carved from boxwood
that grew for a thousand years.
My cousin has a little goat, black
and white, with a delicate
hoof that looks like
onyx from a distance,
and like coal when
you come close
enough to touch it.

—*Susan Stewart*

people to buy more suburban houses? I don't think so. For people to buy more flat-screen TVs on their credit cards? I don't get what they think they're going to be re-starting. We're way over-retailed. We don't need a single extra souvenir-spoon shop in America." He added, "I think what we're seeing, really, is unfortunately another false euphoria."

You could argue that false despair has the more established track record. Thomas Malthus first lent philosophical legitimacy to the apocalyptic inklings of religious prophets with his "Essay on the Principle of Population," in 1798, and secular doom booms have tended to coincide with periods of political upheaval or economic breakdown ever since. The year 1968 brought not only rioting in Paris and the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Bobby Kennedy but the founding of the Club of Rome think tank, with its "Predicament of Mankind" ("If something is to be done it needs to be done now—for otherwise we might be confronted by that ultimate experience: N-E-V-E-R"), as well as the publication of Paul Ehrlich's "Population Bomb." Ehrlich predicted that by 1980 there would be few snooty coastal property owners for the likes of Dmitry Orlov to worry about offending, so bad would be the stench of rotting fish from pesticide runoff.

When I first spoke with Kunstler, by phone, he asked me to imagine the situation in Europe a hundred years ago. "If you said, 'The coming century is going to be a horror show,' you would have been met with disbelief," he told me. "This is the beautiful epoch! We've got elevators and airplanes and motorcars." But both sides would have ended up with defensible cases. Elevators and airplanes and motorcars were followed by still more innovations, like the polio vaccine and the personal computer—which itself became the source of amplified millennial alarm, via the Y2K bug. In April of 1999, Kunstler wrote, "It seems to me that the Y2K problem is so broad, systemic, and unprecedented that imagining its repercussions calls for something besides conventional thinking." He also said, "Y2K is going to rock our world." The actual interruptions barely registered, and from Kunstler's vantage point this can be attributed to a rare reverse-Cassandra effect, in which crisis was narrowly averted because people actually listened to the alarmists and took precautions.

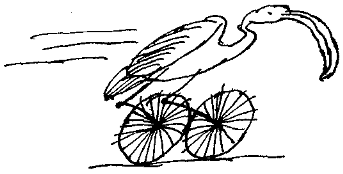
At breakfast, he said that we "misuse the word 'innovation' because it has overtones of magic and the supernatural," and brought up a talk he'd given at the TED Conference—Technology, Entertainment, and Design—in Monterey, in 2004, on the tragedy of suburbia. ("We have about thirty-eight thousand places that are not worth caring about in the United States," he'd told the audience, while showing a slide of a bleak intersection separating a Wal-Mart from a Target. "When we have enough of them, we're going to have a nation that's not worth defending.") A video of the speech has been viewed more than thirty-five thousand times on YouTube, and it ranks among the top fifteen "most persuasive" talks in the TED annals, as judged by visitors to the conference's own Web site, but Kunstler's memory is of being upstaged by an "idiot" inventor's plans to develop a flying car—of being met, in effect, with disbelief. "These were presumably the best young minds of American business, of entrepreneurial, high-tech corporate activity," he said. "And so the consensus among them was that the most interesting and exciting and important thing was flying cars. That shows you where our heads are at. These are the kinds of delusions that bring a society down."

A couple of local businessmen were seated at a table nearby. One of them got up to leave, and said, "Good to see you, Jim."

"Have fun with the markets today," Kunstler replied.

"I don't even watch," the man said, and shook his head.

Later, as Kunstler was leaving, he peered over the shoulder of the cook, who was taking a break and reading *The Saratogian* on a stool at the counter. "Ups and downs," the cook said, referring to the fluctuations of the market in the habitual way of someone unaccustomed to the possibility of a new paradigm. Kunstler held his tongue. A man wearing a suit and a Bluetooth device in his ear sat a couple of stools over, drinking coffee. "Do you ever read his stuff?" he asked the cook, with a grin, as the sage of Saratoga went out the door. Kunstler was flying to Lisbon later that afternoon to speak to a couple of environmental groups, and then to Atlanta (a "giant hairball," he once wrote), to lecture at a university. He now gets about a hundred personal e-mails a day from strangers—college students, in many cases, seeking his advice. "They're all studying to be hedge-fund managers," he told me. "And they're going to end up supervisors of rutabaga pickers."



Before we parted ways, Kunstler stopped on a patch of high ground overlooking a giant parking lot and a couple of bulldozed sites, and reminded me that the core of Saratoga Springs is about the same size, geographically, as the imperial capital of the Roman Empire—another casualty, in its way, of sprawl. "There'll be a timeout for sure," he said, looking at the expanse of dirt and macadam. "The question is how long. You could have been in Rome in the fourth century A.D. and people would have said, 'You know, I think our imperial adventure is over.' And they'd say, 'Yeah, we probably won't be building anything for fifteen years.' Little did they know the population would go from a million to about thirteen thousand over the next millennium."

The Malthusian movement has expanded with time into a kind of peaknik diaspora. Peak oil and peak carbon (i.e., global warming) are the heavies, with the most obviously compelling claims on our attention, and the greatest number of advocates; their relative standings swing in rough accordance with the price of gas and the latest hurricane news. Smaller contenders like peak fish and peak dirt have their devotees as well, and are in some ways more pleasing to contemplate, because they are based on the idea that the path to destruction begins not in the Earth's atmosphere or crust but at the surface, with salmon and topsoil mites. The bailouts in the wake of the subprime defaults, however, have arguably thrust a new concern to the front: peak dollars, or the point at which the system breaks down through the simple printing of paper money. (A corollary, peak debt, was coined in 2006 by a former Cisco employee named Jaswant Jain, who calls himself the Prophet of Doom and Gloom, and who first observed the deleterious effects of unrestrained borrowing as an eight-year-old in a village near the city of Jodhpur, where debt-ridden Brahmins appeared worse off than solvent untouchables.) Viewed from this perspective, Ben Bernanke and Hank Paulson represent substantially greater threats—to the developed world, at least—than Hummers and chemical fertilizer, and we had better start preparing ourselves for a Zimbabwe experience, or, as Jim Sinclair, a currency and commodities trader in Sharon, Connecticut, likes to say, a "planetary Weimar Republic."

Sinclair is king of the goldbugs—an intermediate class of doomer that can't quite embrace a currency in drugs or booze—and proof that, as Dmitry Orlov suspected, some of the most vociferous dystopians these days wear banker's collars and vote Republican. He is fond of quoting Milton Friedman ("Inflation is always and everywhere a monetary phenomenon"), and made his fortune by selling out at the top of the last recession-driven gold boom, in 1980. This time, in the midst of what he calls a "great economic drama," he's not selling; he is the chairman of a publicly traded mining interest in Tanzania, and in April he offered to bet a million dollars against any takers that the price of gold bullion, which was then trading at about nine hundred dollars an ounce, would reach $1,650 by the second week of 2011. He communicates with what he calls his CIGAs—Comrades in Golden Arms—through a Web site, jsmineset.com, on which he posts daily blitzes of commentary with headers like "What Happens in Iceland Doesn't Always Stay in Iceland," and answers readers' questions. Those questions now number as many as seven hundred a day. Sinclair asks that CIGAs use sixteen-point type when e-mailing him, for easier scanning. A widower, he writes and works from his home, a thirty-eight-acre compound he calls Sunnyfield Farms that is protected by motion sensors, and features its own apple orchard, an indoor shooting range, two electric generators, four wells, and storage capacity for tens of thousands of gallons of fuel and water.

On October 18th, responding to a MarketWatch story about the bailouts and their limited emphasis on reforming corporate governance, Sinclair wrote the following:

> My Dear Friends,
>
> I am absolutely sick to my stomach. I am grateful that I am 67 years old because I fear for my children and grand children.
>
> How can they maintain the principles taught to them in a degraded, sinful and sociopathic world?
>
> The world is crying out for relief from a financial world akin to Caligula's rule of Rome.

A month later, one of his memos was posted to the Doomers.us bulletin board, along with the warning "This is about as pure doom as it gets." It began:

> My Dear Extended Family,
>
> Things are now 'Out of Control.' . . .
>
> Now we enter the Collapse of Confidence period. . . .
>
> This broken glass cannot be put back together.
>
> It is heart rending to see a picture of GM autoworkers holding a prayer meeting for their retirement funds. The retirement money was never funded.

Collapse makes good sport for amateur historians, and as many would-be pundits raced backward through the bearish landmarks of American financial history—1998, 1987, 1974, 1929, 1907, 1873, 1837—in search of an impressively jarring analogy for current events, Nassim Taleb, the "Black Swan" theorist, was busy rereading Cicero and Herodotus ("the ancients saw things very clearly"), and thinking more along the lines of 483 B.C., when Xerxes ordered the waters of the Hellespont whipped, out of frustration over the destruction of his bridges. Xerxes' superstitious arrogance, Taleb felt, was no different from our own scientific arrogance, which had been building steadily since the Enlightenment, to the point where investment bankers believed they could eliminate the consequences of risky behavior through the use of complex mathematics. "We're just puppets to the gods," he said. "The gods don't want us to be too ambitious, too aggressive. The gods just want us to be subservient to nature. Leave the planet the way we got it."

Taleb is not anyone's idea of a permaculturalist. A former hedge-fund manager, he lives in Larchmont, and flies frequently to Europe and the Middle East. But he has mostly lost interest in finance—even discounting outright frauds like Bernard Madoff, he says, "the stock market is a mild Ponzi scheme"—and now considers himself primarily a philosopher of randomness, consumed by the limitless possibilities of black swans, or what Donald Rumsfeld called unknown unknowns. He liked to shock friends who asked him about the election last fall by explaining that it didn't matter whom you voted for, and what better proof of this could there be than that George W. Bush had just nationalized the banking industry? "George Bush!" he'd say. "The system will take us where it wants us to go, which is to blow up. Next time, it's going to blow up much bigger."

Whereas Kunstler worries about being marginalized because of an association with "whack jobs" and their fringe ideas (he complains of being "pestered incessantly with conspiracy nutcases"), Taleb wonders how serious people can fail to understand how crazy the world really is. "I got two million e-mails from people saying, 'You're right,'" Taleb said. "About a million people read my book before the crisis, but nobody got protection!" He calls the new book he is working on, for which he received a reported four-million-dollar advance, "my mission to discredit most of organized knowledge." Like Ralph Waldo Emerson, who responded to the crash of 1837 by writing of the "good" in "such emphatic and universal calamity as the times bring," Taleb sees reason for encouragement in, for instance, the rapid shrinking of certain institutional endowments: "Universities will have less funding, so economists will lay low and won't burden us with as much nonsense." (If his own position as Distinguished Professor of Risk Engineering at N.Y.U.'s Polytechnic Institute is jeopardized, so be it.)

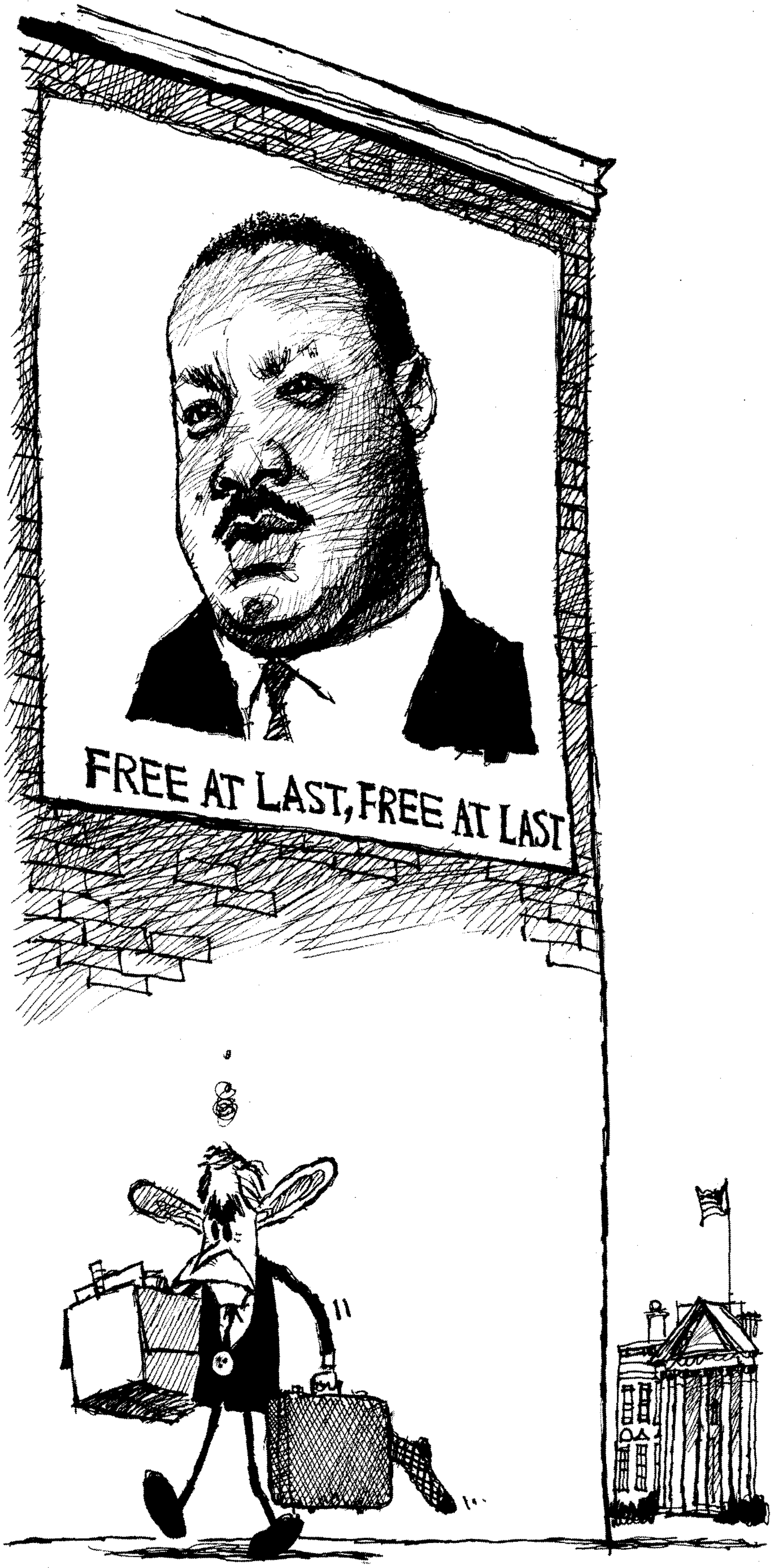
Taleb's perspective is not for the anxious or weak-willed. In an effort to protect yourself from too much dependence, you begin with the certainty that a side effect of globalization is "fragility": a problem in Icelandic banks depresses the lobster-fishing market in Maine. ("Everybody should be told that Thomas Friedman is dangerous to society.") Capitalism itself, through the relentless pressure of quarterly reports, introduces too much efficiency and socially destabilizing leverage, so you recommend a reversion to something like an Islamic banking system, in which debt-based lending is forbidden, or at least heavily discouraged. (Taleb grew up in Lebanon, where an ongoing civil war had the beneficial effect of dissuading people from trusting banks.) You begin to question the Internet, which represents "one degree of complexity too much to handle," and advocate withdrawing from "the idiotic race" for a life of maximum inefficiency and leisure. You start to sound almost like a fellow-traveller of Ted Kaczynski. ("Kaczynski on suburbs and cars was remarkably prescient. His ecoterrorism was extremely poorly received by many people, and he was deranged. The association with his character is not a happy one. Sometimes you have movements that have to start somewhere.") In short, "You end up with antiquity," he said, a new Classical age. "I'm becoming obsessed with my idea."

It is an obsession that can overtake one's experience of daily events, and can hint of a bridge-and-tunnel apocalypse. I spoke with Taleb a few times by phone, and at a certain point in one conversation I couldn't hear him over the sound of a loud and sustained horn—his car horn, I soon learned. "You have to blow the horn so the guy comes," he said. He was on his way from Larchmont to Greenwich Village to have lunch with a friend, and was stuck at the entrance to the Henry Hudson Bridge, in an EZ-Pass lane that wasn't moving.

More honking. "Now it looks like all the EZ-Passes are stuck, in three lanes," he said. "So it's a computer glitch—classic. I'm going to be late to lunch—my first time being late since January of 2007." Here, it seemed, was a micro case study of global collapse at work: an unexpected breakdown in a typically efficient system rendering the contingencies of even the most cautious citizens moot, and concluding in a disorienting din.

A lone toll taker attended to the problem, accepting cash from one of the lead cars, and afterward the line began to move more steadily, which caused Taleb to reconsider his initial diagnosis of the problem. "Is it a random event

SKETCHBOOK BY MIKE LUCKOVICH


FREE AT LAST, FREE AT LAST

that three people are stuck paying cash in EZ-Pass lanes?" he asked, as he inched closer to the tollbooth. "Let's see if mine works.

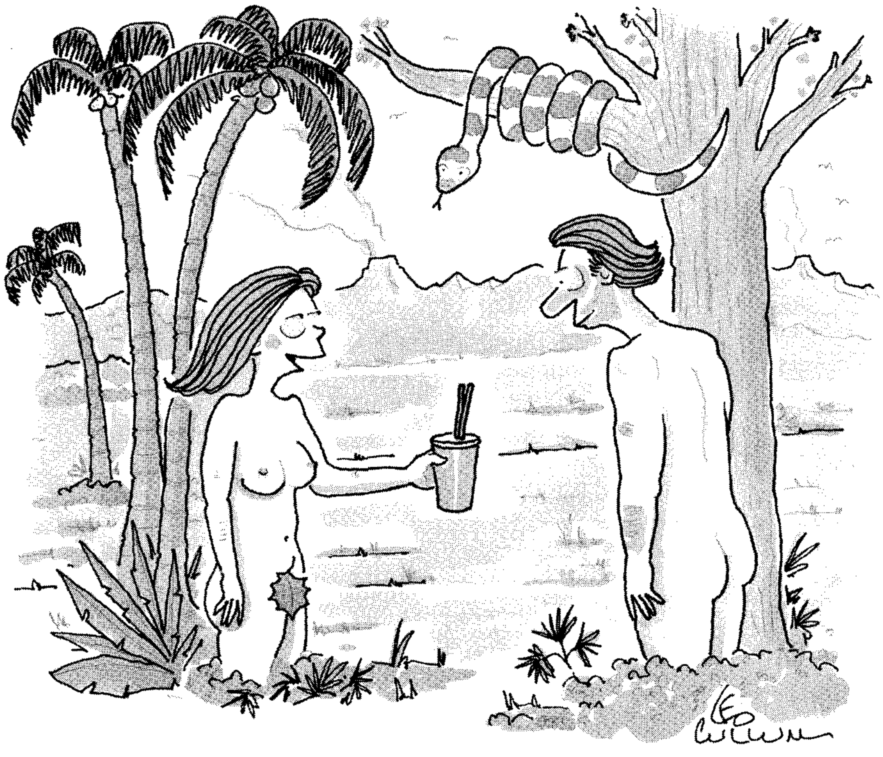
"It works! So there's three different lanes that were blocked by people paying cash in EZ-Pass lanes, and only one technician." In the Soviet Union, Dmitry Orlov might say, they'd never have fired the tollbooth operators in the first place. Taleb was now running late—his streak of punctuality in jeopardy. As he drove, he began telling the cautionary story of Casanova, a guy who kept narrowly averting catastrophe (angry husbands, angry priests) and succumbed to the illusion of inevitable survival. All around Taleb himself, meanwhile, was danger. "Someone almost hit me in a big Sierra truck," he said. "I should have eggs to throw at them. Big gas guzzlers!"

Three days after the Presidential election, Jim Kunstler stood at a podium beneath a life-size portrait of George Washington, in Montpelier, Vermont, and called himself "an emissary from a place you may someday regard as foreign: New York State. . . . For the moment, we remain sister and brother states in a nation that is enduring a convulsion." He declared that the airline industry as we know it will not exist within forty-eight months, or by the end of President Obama's first term. His audience was an assemblage of nearly two hundred neo-Luddites and anarchists and socialists and freegans and steampunks and home-schoolers and folksingers and knitters and yak farmers—Dmitry Orlov's future trading partners. These were people whose solution to the imminent death of the American dream was secession: a Vermont Independence Convention, sponsored by the Second Vermont Republic, a "nonviolent citizens' network and think tank opposed to the tyranny of Corporate America and the U.S. Government." (The first Vermont Republic existed from 1777 to 1791.) For the cause of secession, the S.V.R. had managed to secure, at no cost, the daylong use of the House chamber of the state capitol. A couple of teen-agers from Montpelier High School had sought and received the permission of their principal to skip class and join the revolution. They wore T-shirts that read "U.S. out of VT." One said, "There were going to be more of us if McCain won." His friend added, "Everyone's like, 'Why do we need to secede? We got Obama.'"

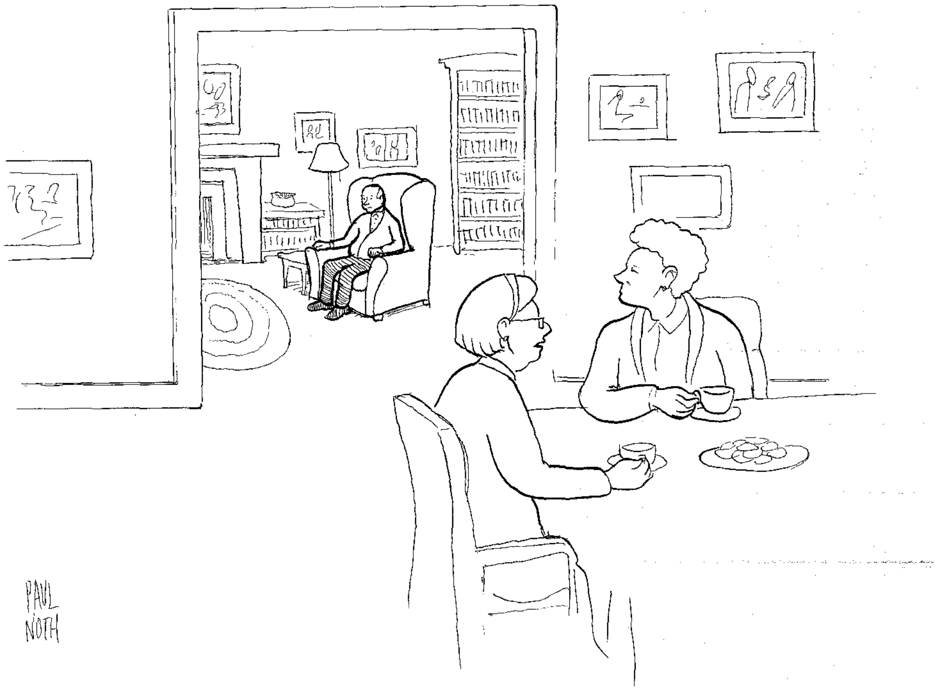
The convention's opening speaker was a trend forecaster named Gerald Celente, who registered the domain name panicof08.com in the fall of 2007, anticipating what he called "an economic 9/11." "We're the only country in the world that has these things called self-storage units, where people have so much junk they have to move it off site," he said. "Well, guess what. Self-storage is going to live up to its true name, as people decide to move into those." He warned of an emergency bank holiday soon after Inauguration Day, and predicted tax revolts within the next two years.

Privately, Celente stressed to me that he's "very optimistic," because out of chaos comes greatness ("When you look at the Renaissance, it happened after the last Dark Age"), at least for those who are prepared. On the morning of the actual 9/11, in 2001, Celente had called his girlfriend in New York and told her to withdraw all her money and meet him at his house upstate, in Rhinebeck. She said, "Oh, Gerald, you're kidding." He wasn't kidding. He called his bank and asked them to wire all his money to Rhinebeck. They said, "Sorry, Mr. Celente, we can't. Wall Street is closed." He felt fortunate to have some gold. He thought of Indian Point, the nuclear power plant fifty miles down the Hudson, as another potential target, and immediately filled up both of his cars with gas, bought bags of dried figs, dates, and raisins, and readied his Chinese SKS rifle. ("It's accurate, it's light, it's simple: knock it down, put it back together in no time.") He figured he could be in Canada in four hours. "So when it happened, I was ready to move," he said. "Same thing with this. My money's out of the banks. I'm only interested in gold."

Celente was followed at the podium by Kirkpatrick Sale, who has a running ten-thousand-dollar bet with Kevin Kelly, a founding editor of *Wired*, that a convergence of crises—financial, environmental, political—will render entire continents unlivable by 2020; Chellis Glendinning, the author of "My Name Is Chellis and I'm in Recovery from Western Civilization," who had flown in from New Mexico; and Lynette Clark, the chair of the Alaskan Independence Party, to which Todd Palin belonged for seven years. Assuming Alaska has not achieved na-



"Apple smoothie?"



"He just doesn't know what to do with himself since he passed away."

• •

tionhood by 2012, Clark, a U.S. Air Force veteran who now calls herself "an Alaskan, not an American," intends to support a Sarah Palin Presidential run, and her popularity with the crowd in Montpelier served as a reminder that this is a revolution as yet untroubled by Bolshevik-Menshevik-style squabbles. ("That's the exciting thing about collapse—the breaking down of barriers and definitions that just don't work anymore," Carolyn Baker, the author of the forthcoming book "Sacred Demise: Walking the Spiritual Path of Industrial Civilization's Collapse," told me.)

Clark—or Yukon Yonda, as she is known in her home village of Fox, north of Fairbanks—wore a grizzly-bear claw on a chain around her neck and gold nuggets for earrings. "When we need to pay a bill, we dig a hole in the yard and get the yellow rocks out," she said. "It's the most sustainable way." She and her husband, Dexter, met while prospecting. They refer to their home as the Biosphere, make wine from rhubarb and raspberries, and have a house pig, Rosie, but they also enforce a strict "no trespassing" rule against stray animals—caribou, lynx, squirrels—that wander across their property line, which is one of several reasons that she always packs a Colt .45. Dexter is on the village Roadkill Committee. "When a moose gets killed on the highway, we go out, gut it, skin it, and disperse that meat through the community," she said.

The speeches were accompanied by comic and musical interludes from the Bread & Puppet Theatre, whose members wore bear costumes and danced around with plungers, and by the singing of the Vermont secession anthem: "It's Vermonters to the lifeboats, this is a sinkin' ship . . ." For lunch, I joined Rob Williams, a co-founder of the Vermont Yak Company ("Once you go yak, you never go back") and his friend Andrew, a bearded Ben & Jerry's employee, at a café downtown called That's Life Soup. Andrew and I ordered Yahoo President Obama Election Stew. Williams, who also edits a bimonthly newspaper called *Vermont Commons: Voices of Independence*, opted for the vegan chili. He is what Vermonters call a flatlander; before going yak, he spent eight years in New Mexico, where, as he explained, "there's not enough water to go around." Depending on the foreclosure rate, his migration may turn out to have prefigured an exodus from the so-called sand states of the Southwest, which Kunstler sees as likely targets of Mexican *reconquista*.

During the afternoon session, the founder of the Second Vermont Republic, a retired Duke economics professor named Thomas Naylor, who wore a green jacket, like a winner at Augusta National, offered his best pragmatic rationale for a successfully "genteel" coup. "Vermont has nothing, O.K.?" he said. "We have no big cities. We have no big buildings. We have *nothing*. Suppose the red-state, nuclear-armed army were to attack us. What would they do? Burn the sugar maples?" The tricky part comes during Stage Two: teaming up with New Hampshire, Maine, and the Canadian Maritime Provinces to form a "pretty little country about the size of Denmark." He'd call it New Acadia. (Even secessionists are not immune from the temptations of expansion.) Naylor, who likens globalization to the Tower of Babel, refers to New York City as "the great Satan," which, by his own admission, may explain the fact that his son is enrolled at the New School and living in the financial district.

Any good political convention has its breakout star—its Obama of 2004—and my internal polling mechanism pointed to Dennis Steele, a fifth-generation Vermonter and father of two, from the town of Kirby (pop. 500). Steele runs a Web site called chessmaniac.com, and was one of the last to speak. He wore a jean jacket and a Ron Paul cap over his longish hair, and taunted the presiding governor of the state of Vermont, Jim Douglas, for not venturing down the hall to acknowledge the insurrection. "This will be remembered as the most important movement in recent world history," Steele said, and quoted the great revolutionary Ethan Allen ("The Gods of the hills are not the Gods of the valley"), whose name, if Kunstler's predictions are to be trusted, may yet be liberated from an association with upholstered living rooms. Steele announced the formation of a new Green Mountain Brigade, and held up a petition with thirty-eight signatures that he'd collected: Kirbyites for a free Vermont. "That's the first step of the revolution, besides drinking raw milk," he said. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

An audio interview with Ben McGrath.

PROFILES

MAN AND BEAST

The narrative art of Walton Ford.

BY CALVIN TOMKINS

The Tasmanian wolf, also known as the Tasmanian tiger, was neither a wolf nor a tiger. It was a thylacine, a marsupial cousin to kangaroos and wallabies, which evolved over several million years, in the forests of Australia and New Guinea, into a fearsome apex predator. Long extinct on the mainland, carnivorous thylacines survived on the island of Tasmania into the early years of the twentieth century, when the settlers finished them off. Their violent extinction is the central drama of Walton Ford's latest painting, a huge and surpassingly weird watercolor whose early stages I observed during several visits last fall to his ramshackle, barnlike studio in Great Barrington, Massachusetts.

"This animal scared the hell out of the settlers," Ford said, exuberantly. "It looked like a wolf, but with stripes, like a tiger, and they could get up on their hind legs, which made them even scarier. The settlers were sheepherders, and they built up this myth of a huge, bipedal, nocturnal vampire-beast that sucked the blood of sheep. The settlers put a bounty on these animals and began killing them off in every possible way—poison, traps, snares, guns. The last known one died in captivity in the nineteen-thirties, but they lived on in people's imagination."

Ford's painting, which was spread across three large sheets of paper pinned to the wall, showed a roiling pyramid of murderous animals, lightly blocked out in washes of yellow ochre and raw umber. A few of the thylacines had lambs or parts of lambs in their jaws, but others seemed to be biting and tearing viciously at one another. "My idea," he said, "was to make an island out of thylacines and killed sheep—they're not on an island; they *are* the island—and to have it sinking beneath the waves. I want it to be a brutal picture of thylacine bloodlust, a blame-the-victim picture, a sort of fever dream of the Tasmanian settler alone in the bush with these animals, although there was never any evidence of one killing a human being, and very little evidence of their eating sheep."

The way he described it, the whole thing sounded hilarious. Ford, who is forty-eight years old and powerfully built, with a shaved head and a rapid-fire, nonstop way of talking, overwhelms you with his enthusiasm for what he does. And you have to agree that he does it very well. As a realist painter of birds, quadrupeds, reptiles, and other species, Ford has any

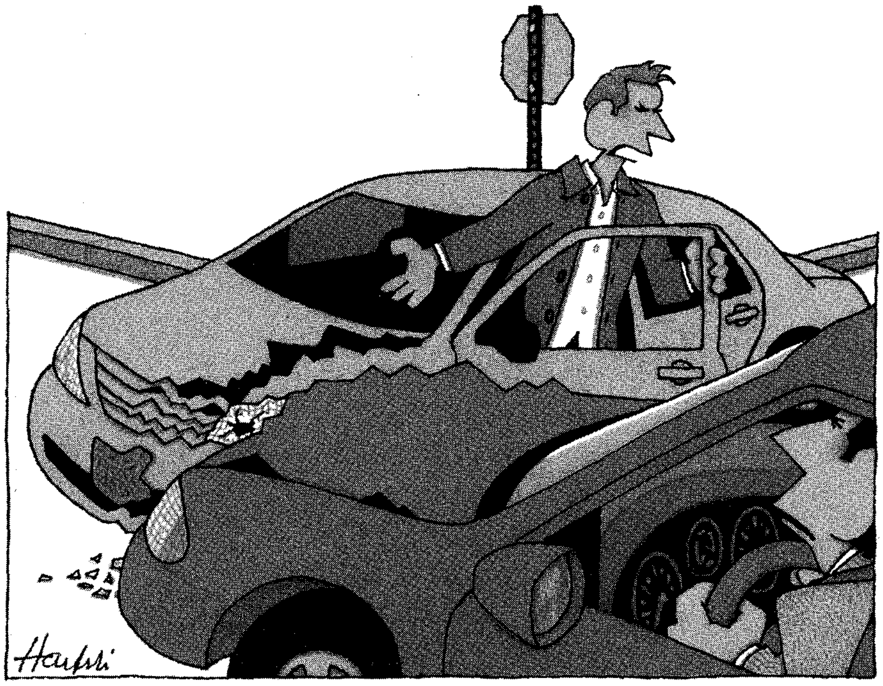
PLATYPUS: HANS REINHARD/CORBIS

number of peers in the field of natural-history illustration but very few in the world of contemporary art. His technical facility is dazzling. Working almost exclusively in watercolor, he can render feathers, fur, hide, trees, plants, weather, landscape, and other natural elements with virtuosic skill. No one else, to my knowledge, has ever done watercolors of this size and ambition—the thylacine painting measures eleven and a half feet long by eight feet high—and no contemporary artist has employed natural history to tell the kind of stories that Ford tells. Although human beings appear only marginally in his work, if at all, most of his paintings have to do with the deep interaction between man and animal. "I do a huge amount of research on animals," he told me at one point. "But it's the person that gives me a way in. Animals in the wild are boring. Before Fay Wray comes to Skull Island, King Kong isn't doing anything. There's no story until she shows up. . . . What I'm doing, I think, is a sort of cultural history of the way animals live in the human imagination."

There were six large paintings in Ford's most recent New York show, at the Paul Kasmin Gallery, in Chelsea, last spring, and each one told a tale. In the past, Ford sometimes wrote excerpts from his research right on the painting, in spidery handwriting that mimicked the field notes of John James Audubon and the other nineteenth-century natural-history artists he admires, but he has more or less stopped doing this. Now he prefers to let the image stand on its own and project its mysterious aura. His three-panel "Loss of the Lisbon Rhinoceros," the most arresting image in the 2008 show, is based on an incident in the year 1515, when a ship carrying a captive Indian rhino as a gift from King Manuel, of Portugal, to Pope Leo X, in Rome, foundered in a storm off the coast of Genoa and went down with all hands and hoofs. (This was the first rhino seen in Europe since Roman times; descriptions of it inspired Dürer's famous but inaccurate woodcut.) What the viewer sees is the tremendous animal standing on the ship's deck, legs awash in fast-rising seawater, head raised and eyes fixed on the hilly shoreline it could probably swim to if its hind leg weren't chained to the mast of the doomed vessel. You don't have to know all this, any more than you have to know what's going on in "Tur," a 2007 picture dominated by a hugely horned bull in a snowy landscape, but Ford is happy to fill you in. "That's an aurochs," he said, showing me a reproduction in the lavish, oversized art book on his work that Taschen published a year ago, in a limited edition of a hundred copies. (The edition included a signed Ford print, and cost seven thousand dollars; a smaller, less lavish version comes out this spring, for seventy dollars.) "It's a prehistoric bull, the one you see in the cave paintings at Lascaux. This is pretty much the first thing a human being ever painted. They were incredibly dangerous animals, who survived into relatively recent times."

Ford's studio is on the second floor of a former railroad warehouse, just beyond the tracks and close to the center of town. He didn't really start the big, narrative paintings he does now until he moved

The artist in his studio with two works in progress, "Housatonic Ghost Cats" and "The Island." Photomontage by Josef Astor.



"Didn't you see me dart out in front of you?"

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here from Manhattan, in 1995, with his wife, Julie, and their two-year-old daughter, Lillian. (Their second child, Camellia, was born two years later.) The long, L-shaped studio has windows on one side, and two overstuffed and very beat-up armchairs, where he does most of his reading. The floor is littered with open books and magazines, sketches, photographs, images taken off the Internet, opened and unopened mail, extension cords, and overflowing cardboard boxes—one of them full of small plastic animal figurines, including a thylacine, which he uses to help him get different views of the creatures he's painting. Ford's hiking gear occupies an area of floor space in back—boots, backpack, rain gear, sleeping bag, and other items that sustain him on the weeklong, solo wilderness treks that his restless nature requires once or twice a year.

There are a few large bookcases, which his new studio assistant, Anna Booth, is trying to organize, but Ford usually manages to find whatever he's looking for in the chaos. Sweeping a mass of papers off a chair so that I could sit down, he picked up one of his well-worn art books and opened it to a reproduction of Géricault's "The Raft of the Medusa." "Géricault doesn't go away, does he?" Ford said. "That's because he had a very contemporary, dark way of looking at things. The drawings that led up to this painting were very helpful to me in figuring how the shapes would fit together in my thylacine triptych. Looking at the Géricault was what made me realize I wanted to make an island of thylacines, sinking in the ocean."

I asked him about the difference between art and illustration. Springing up from his chair, he stumbled on a plastic animal, sent it flying with a kick, and returned carrying a book opened to Delacroix's "Liberty Leading the People." On one level, he said, the painting was as stupid and obvious as an election poster; what made it art was "all in the treatment." Ford said that he was interested in fudging the line between art and illustration; a lot of great art was illustration, and vice versa, depending on the degree of skill and imagination the artist brought to it. But there was another factor, too, and it involved the viewer's participation. "Norman Rockwell wanted to tackle civil rights," Ford said. "So what does he do? He does a painting from the point of view of a little black girl in a perfect Sunday dress, and there's a tomato splashed on the wall right near her head, and two U.S. marshals' legs on either side of her, and you have only one place to go—you're stuck with Norman Rockwell's interpretation. Some people love it, because you're off the hook, everyone understands it right away. Illustration can be a starting point, but to become art it has to open up and allow for other interpretations—then you get the kind of work I love most." He named Goya's "Los Caprichos" and "The Disasters of War." Also Bosch's "The Temptation of St. Anthony," works by Bruegel, Dürer, Giotto, and the nineteenth-century English landscape painter Samuel Palmer, and "that fantastic Winslow Homer image of a fox in the snow, with the crows. Nobody would say that's just illustration. It's a powerful and romantic work."

"In my case," he said, a little later, "I wanted to take the language of the nineteenth-century natural-history illustrators and use it in a way they would never have imagined—to plumb our own collective ways of thinking about the natural world and these beings we share the planet with."

Ford's interest in the natural world is familial. His pre-Civil War ancestors on both sides were plantation owners in Tennessee and Georgia, whose impoverished male descendants hewed to the values of the gentleman sportsman. Ford's parents turned their backs on the South and the past when they got married and moved to New York, but his father, Enfield Berry Ford, known since childhood as Flicky, remained an ardent fly fisherman and hiker all his life, and often took his wife and four children on fishing trips to Canada during the summer. They lived in Larchmont, and Flicky, who had once gone to the Art Students League and wanted to be a cartoonist, commuted to Manhattan, where he worked as an art director for Time Life, designing brochures and in-house publications. "He was a big personality, a big drinker, a womanizer, and a wild man," Ford said. "Sort of hard to be around when I was a teen-ager." When the womanizing broke up the marriage and Flicky left home for good, Walton, who was eleven at the time, remembers feeling relieved.

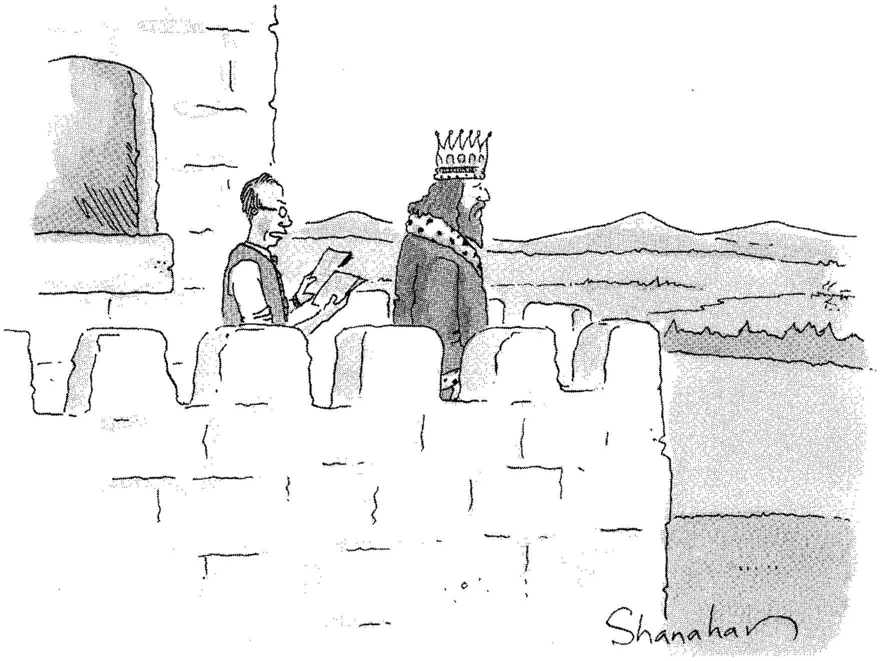
Both Walton and his brother Enfield (called Flick), the firstborn, who is six years older, started drawing when they were young. Their parents gave Flick a copy of Audubon's "Birds of America" one Christmas, and Walton copied many of the plates. Flick, who became a natural-history painter—his 2006 book, "Fish," is recognized as the best thing in its field—saw right away that Walton was a more gifted artist than he was. "From a very early age," he told me recently, "Walt was thinking about how to make an impact in the art world."

All Walton really cared about then was drawing and being in the woods (which were in short supply around Larchmont). "I was a bad kid," he told me. "I had dreadful grades. I never played football, or joined any of those things in school." He cut classes, shunned homework, and, in junior high school, smoked his share of pot. His college prospects looked dim, but then his mother, who was working as the director of development for Sleepy Hollow Restoration, in Tarrytown, saved the day by getting him into the summer art program at the Rhode Island School of Design. He did this for one summer, joyously ("I found that the things I could do were valued! I went from being fairly invisible in high school to being a star"), and built up a portfolio that was good enough to get him into RISD, which he entered in 1978. "I knew I was going to be O.K. then," he said. "From the time I was six, I'd wanted to be an artist."

In his second year, however, Ford decided to major in filmmaking. He wanted to tell stories, and he thought that he could do that better with film. The decision was reinforced by his friendship with Jeffrey Eugenides, who was then a student at nearby Brown University. They'd met in an acting class at Brown, where Eugenides's performance of a scene from David Mamet's "Sexual Perversity in Chicago" had been as much of an eyeopener for Ford as Ford's impersonation of an ape had been for Eugenides. "Jeff was one of the super-brains of our generation," Ford said. "And I was blown away. I began reading Mamet, and 'The Tin Drum,' and 'The Painted Bird,' and all sorts of stuff. The literary crowd at Brown sort of adopted me, because I was a paint-splattered hipster and more successful with women than they were." Eugenides, who won a Pulitzer Prize in 2003 for his novel "Middlesex," confirms this. "Walton was famous at school for his dexterity at drawing, for being funny, and for his all-American appeal to the ladies," he told me. "We were all girl-shy and nervous, and he was the opposite." The proof was Ford's success in winning Julie Jones, the most beautiful girl in his class at RISD and also, as he still maintains, the most gifted—she made fluent realist drawings of people in strange but convincing interiors. "I thought I was going to be a James Bond guy," Ford said, "but there she was. I was a goner." They started dating in their freshman year, when they were both eighteen, and they've been together ever since.

In their senior year, Walton and Julie were both picked for an honors-program semester in Rome. For Ford, the main event there was going to Assisi and seeing Giotto's cycle of paintings on the life of St. Francis. "It made the biggest impact on me of anything that happened at RISD," he said. "The storytelling is so clean and clear. It's unbelievably emotional without being overblown, like in the Sistine Chapel. I was supposed to make a film in Italy, but I couldn't finish it, because I just started painting and drawing again. I realized I was going to be a narrative painter."

It was hard going during the next ten years, finding his way in an art world where he often felt hopelessly out of step. After a tentative postgraduate stopover in Newport, Rhode Island, where Ford did drawings of beds, draperies, and other designer furnishings and Julie painted signs for shopkeepers, they made the inevitable move to New York, in 1983. To pay the rent on the apartment they found, in what was then a fairly rough neighborhood in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, Ford joined a group of slightly older RISD grads who had started a business renovating apartments in the Dakota, on Central Park West—doing cabinetry, wood refinishing, and other specialized jobs. Julie had been hired as the bookkeeper for a Manhattan jewelry firm run by the family of Walton's closest childhood friend, Walter McTeigue. Walton and Julie, who got married in 1985, both managed to make time for their own work. "I was doing large-scale oil paintings on wood, which looked something like Hudson River School landscapes," Ford told me. "It wasn't successful work." He also designed a few book jackets, and tried his hand at some illustrations for the *Times*, which turned them down. "I was very unsuccessful as an illustrator," he said. Julie's exquisite figure drawings and Walton's somewhat inchoate visual narratives seemed far removed from any of the trends in contemporary art. The spotlight then was on big, noisy, semi-figurative paintings by Julian Schnabel, David Salle, and the other so-called neo-expressionists, American and European, and on the graffiti-inspired generation of Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring. A few New York painters, including Eric Fischl and Mark Tansey,



"Bottom line? You're still king of about two-thirds of all you survey."

were exploring forms of narrative realism, but Ford was way out on his own premodern, nineteenth-century limb.

LAST ROBOT SONG

It was a little newborn god
That made the first instrument:
Sweet vibration of
Mind, mind, mind
Enclosed in its orbit.

He scooped out a turtle's shell
And strung it with a rabbit's guts.
O what a stroke to invent
Music from an empty case
Strung with bloody filaments—

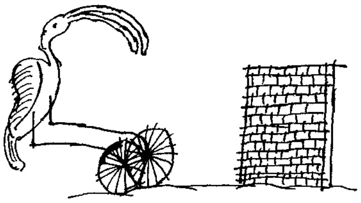
The wiry rabbitflesh
Plucked or strummed,
Pulled taut across the gutted
Resonant hull of the turtle:
Music from strings that
Tremble over a hollow—
Sweet conception, sweet
Instrument of

Mind, mind, mind:
Itself a capable vibration
Thrumming from here to there

Ford's early efforts did not go unnoticed. At the beginning of the nineteen-nineties, he had shows at two downtown galleries—Bess Cutler and Nicole Klagsbrun. Marcia Tucker, the director of the New Museum of Contemporary Art, liked Ford's work and put it in group shows (she also used Walton and Julie as occasional babysitters). When the couple moved to lower Manhattan, in 1992, to a loft on Chambers Street, Bill Arning, who ran the nonprofit art gallery White Columns, sent Irving Blum down to see Ford's work. Blum, the co-owner of the Blum-Helman Gallery, on Fifty-seventh Street, found the paintings "conservative, yet oddly beguiling." They were not right for his regular clients, he said, but Blum himself bought a watercolor bird drawing, done very much in the style of Audubon, and over the next few months he kept on buying more of them, for fifteen hundred dollars apiece. Ford had just started doing these Audubon knockoffs, and he was conflicted about it. Ever since childhood, hooked on Audubon's great images, he'd drawn birds and animals in his school notebooks, but he never thought that he could make art this way. "I thought it was for people who did duck stamps," he said. The watercolor images of birds he was doing now "looked exactly like Audubons," he said, "but there would be something wrong in each one. I did a sparrow hawk, on top of an enormous pile of sparrows he had killed—way too many."

Ford's ambivalent relationship with Audubon was something he had to work out. A trip to India helped. Julie had applied for a Fulbright Indo-American Fellowship, to study eighteenth-century Tantric designs. When the grant came through, two years later, in 1994, the Fords and their daughter Lillian, who was then a year and a half, spent the next six months immersed in a culture that Ford found thoroughly baffling. "You're starting from scratch in India," Ford said. "Physical gestures are different, you're not making connections, and you become so annoyed, and impatient, and missing the point. And then you think, Wow, that's what we do with cultures we don't understand. I'd already started doing those pseudo-Audubon pictures, trying to add another layer of meaning. I didn't do any painting in India, but when I got back I started right away using Indian birds and animals to get at these issues of global misunderstanding." In a jewel-like etching called "Bangalore," an Indian kingfisher perches in a tree, along with a gaudy, American-made bass lure. "What's he doing with it?" Ford asked, rhetorically. "Impossible to tell. It doesn't belong in India."

Two months after their return, in 1995, the Fords moved to the Berkshires. Walter McTeigue, Walton's childhood friend, had been living there since 1992; he had reëstablished his jewelry business in Great Barrington after trying to make it as a dairy farmer. When the Fords came up for a visit, McTeigue told them that the old farmhouse he had once lived in was available and that they could rent it for seven hundred dollars a month, about half of what they were paying in the city, and they decided to give it a try.



Getting out of New York enabled Ford to make his peace, at last, with Audubon. "Anybody who reads up on Audubon is going to have mixed feelings about him," he told me. "He was a braggart, a liar, and just too trigger-happy, even for that time. He killed hundreds and hundreds of birds he didn't need. He shot things off the deck of a ship, and just let them fall in the ocean. As I often say, he was more like a National Rifle Association guy than an Audubon Society guy. But the paintings are beautiful." What was it about them, I asked, that appealed to him so much? "I liked their weirdness," he said. "It wasn't realism. He'd shoot the birds, and pin them down on a board with wires, in strange positions. Most natural-history artists today try to make what look like painted photographs, but Audubon gives you that pre-photographic way of looking, where the paper functions as air."

Ford can't praise Audubon without giving you the other side. "He was an awkward draftsman. After he'd painted the birds, he wanted to paint all the North

In the cloven brainflesh
Contained in its helmet of bone—
Like an electronic boxful
Of channels and filaments
Bundled inside its case,
A little musical robot

Dreamed up by the mind
Embedded in the brain
With its blood-warm channels
And its humming network
Of neurons, engendering

The newborn baby god—
As clever and violent
As his own instrument
Of sweet, all-consuming
Imagination, held
By its own vibration,

Mind, mind, mind pulled
Taut in its bony shell,
Dreaming up Heaven and Hell.

—*Robert Pinsky*

American mammals, and there you see how hard it was for him to deal with perspective, and anatomy, and the animal's way of moving. Audubon's son drew most of the larger mammals, which are terrible, but Audubon did the smaller ones, and you can see animals that were in every way superior to his in the work of other nineteenth-century natural-history artists, like Edward Lear. People think of Lear for 'The Owl and the Pussycat' and 'The Book of Nonsense,' but he was better than Audubon as a natural-history artist." Ford readily concedes that Audubon is the cornerstone of his own work, but, to me, Ford's conceptual wildness—the tension between nature and culture, fornication and extinction, the animal and the human—makes him contemporary in ways that Audubon could hardly have imagined. As Ford says, Audubon would not have painted an island of doomed thylacines.

Ford and Julie and the girls now live in Southfield, a pretty village ten miles east of Great Barrington. The family's pets include a guinea pig, a gerbil, two horses (which they board at a nearby stable), a rabbit, and a small black schipperke, the same breed of dog that Walton had as a child. Julie stopped painting when Camellia was born, to give more time to the children, but recently she's started to work again, in a space that Walton partitioned off for her in his Great Barrington studio.

"I don't think I became an artist until about ten years ago," Ford told me. The key element for him was giving up oil paint. Not many artists have established major reputations with watercolor alone. Charles Burchfield did so, and Winslow Homer's watercolors are preferred in some quarters to his oils, but, because watercolors are on paper, the art market has always priced them well below works on canvas. Ford was coming to understand, however, that the traditional medium for natural-history art was what best suited his particular talents.

His first show at Paul Kasmin's gallery, in 1997, included as many oil paintings as watercolors. The pictures in that show were priced low, from five to ten thousand dollars, and "there wasn't a big rush" to buy them, Kasmin recalls. "The subject matter made a lot of people think I'd had a complete lapse of judgment, or taste." But the market was opening up to more eclectic kinds of work, and Kasmin eventually sold nearly every painting in the show. During the next few years, working mainly in watercolor, Ford became increasingly skillful and a great deal more confident. His pictures got bigger and more complex, his stories more outrageous. In some of them, the focus is on one or two birds or animals, which are often engaged in violent combat, copulation, or both. "Chingado" shows a Spanish bull raping a Mexican jaguar, whose fangs are sunk in the bull's throat. "They're coupling to create Mexico," Ford told me, airily, on one of my later visits to the studio. Other paintings contain a multiplicity of creatures whose plight refers to historical events or legends. At first glance, the long procession of great auks in "Funk Island" winds, lemming-like, over a rocky landscape, toward the distant fires and cauldrons that signal their extinction as a species. Clear enough, but what is going on in that huge cloud of smoke from the fires? Closer examination reveals dozens of naked men and women in erotic combinations. Ford's research had disclosed that the flightless auks were clubbed to death, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, so that their plumage could be used in feather beds and pillows. "This was the global economy in action, right?" he said. "It was like a goddam Auschwitz for birds, so the Marquis de Sade and Casanova could do their fucking on feather beds!"

The stories he was telling required more space, and his paintings expanded to provide it. He bought his paper in twenty-yard rolls, and cut it himself. Ten feet by five was about the limit, he found, because watercolor requires Plexiglas to protect it, and anything larger would make the framed pictures too heavy. He started out by mopping the whole sheet with water, to keep it from shrinking unevenly when he put the paint on, and then, to give his pictures the foxed look of old engravings or book pages, he'd paint the edges with a wash of water and raw umber. "This is something I've had to make up as I go," he told me. Ford also started working with a master printer in New Hampshire named Peter Pettengill; the series of six aquatint etchings they produced, over a seven-year period, are the same size as Audubon's Double Elephant Folio prints.

Ford works slowly, producing only

three or four large paintings a year, on average, and even in the currently downsizing art market there is a waiting list of people who want them. The buyers tend not to be well-known collectors of contemporary art. A woman from Tennessee owns "Falling Bough," a large and dramatic painting of passenger pigeons; it hangs in her apartment in the Dakota, where Ford worked when he first came to New York. Mick Jagger recently bought "Hyrcania," a painting of an Iranian tiger from Ford's 2008 show, and the Smithsonian Institution acquired "Tur," the great aurochs. "Nila," his largest work to date—a life-size Indian elephant in full stride, composed in twenty-two sections and measuring twelve by eighteen feet over all—occupies an entire ballroom wall in a Rhinebeck estate. So far, museums have held back. The Museum of Modern Art's only Walton Ford is a small print—a version of "Bangalore." The Whitney acquired a complete set of his large-scale prints, and included them in a group show in 2003; it still has no paintings. The Brooklyn Museum gave him a solo show in 2006, did very little to promote it (no catalogue), and bought nothing from it. Ford's New York shows have been favorably reviewed, for the most part, with an emphasis on his brilliant craftsmanship and on what the *Times*' Randy Kennedy, writing about the Brooklyn Museum show, described as an atmosphere where "the calm of Audubon gives way to the creepiness of Francis Bacon and sometimes even to the horrors of Wes Craven."

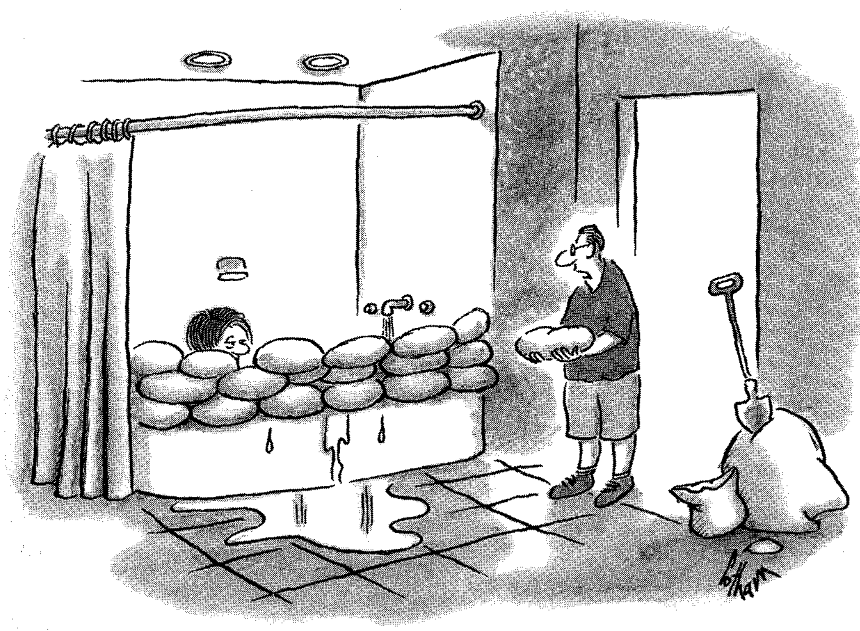
Ford's big pictures now bring around four hundred thousand dollars, and one of them, the "Lisbon Rhinoceros," sold last year for six hundred and fifty thousand. This is well below the millions that Jeff Koons, Damien Hirst, and other entrepreneur-artists have pulled down in recent years, but Ford has no gripes. "I do exactly what I want to do, and I get well paid," as he put it. "So I don't sweat global dominance." The question of whether he's an artist or an illustrator still hangs over him, although less so as time goes on. "I don't think he's an illustrator," Robert Storr, a former MOMA curator who is now the dean of the School of Art at Yale, told me last fall. "Basically, illustration serves to depict something that already exists as a verbal idea. Ford uses illustrational techniques. He's taken a lot from Audubon, and he's done it very well, but Audubon is not just an illustrator. He's a serious and interesting artist, and I think Ford has understood the ways in which his work is potent."

"He's gonna be in and out for a while, so we should write something funny on his forehead."

One crisp, sunny day in November, I spent two hours with Ford in the American Museum of Natural History. We had lunch first, in a restaurant across from Lincoln Center. On the façade of the Metropolitan Opera House, Ford's fifty-foot-high banner of Mephistopheles, in the form of a goat standing on its hind legs, announced the new production of Berlioz's "The Damnation of Faust." Ford was excited about the banner, which he could see from the restaurant, and about being in New York. "I feel like an animal out of the cage," he said. "I spend all that time by myself in the studio, and then I come here and drink wine and look at beautiful people." He had on his city clothes, black jeans and a Western-style checked shirt with mother-of-pearl snaps, and his energy level was high. He finished off his plate of charcuterie in short order, and ate half of mine, announcing, "As long as they make prosciutto, I'm never going to be a vegetarian."

Ford has been visiting the natural-history museum since he was five. Whenever he starts a painting, he said, he goes there first and makes drawings of the bird or animal he's going to depict. "I have no excuse to get anything wrong," he said. "They don't move, they don't go to sleep, they don't hide like they would at the zoo." For his thylacine painting, he looked up images in the files of the museum's mammalogy department, where he is well regarded. Recently, he brought his two daughters, who are horse-mad and ride several days a week, to see the museum's exhibition "The Horse."

We went first to the Hall of North American Birds, to look at some of the museum's oldest exhibits—small-scale dioramas showing peregrine falcons, barn swallows, shorebirds, and other local species against backgrounds that were painted around the turn of the last century. "Look at this one," he said, of a bucolic Hudson River scene with a small sailboat tied up to a dock. "That's about as exquisite as a work of art gets." The artistry of the dioramas seemed to excite him even more than the wildlife in them. Stray visitors stopped to listen as he talked about Carl Akeley, the naturalist and explorer whose pioneering innovations in taxidermy had made the museum's most spectacular dioramas possible. "Akeley really built this museum," he said. "He gathered a group of artists who worked here into the nineteen-thirties, creating the dioramas. You'll never get that degree of perfection again, with this kind of weather and light and atmosphere." We moved on, at a fast clip, to the Hall of North American Mammals, where, he said, the artists' techniques had reached their highest level. Ford knew which artist had done each diorama. His favorites were James Perry Wilson and Carl Rungius. "Wilson is my man," he said, almost beside himself with admiration. "He's everywhere here. He did the jaguar, and the coyotes." We stood for quite a while looking at Wilson's diorama of two gray wolves running in the snow, at dusk, in Gunflint Lake, Minnesota. "Isn't this one of the most beautiful things in New York?" Ford asked, in a hushed voice.



"Turn off the water, hon. I can't keep sandbagging forever."

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Before leaving, Ford insisted that we look at the gorillas in the Akeley Hall of African Mammals. The gorilla diorama is huge, a mountainous landscape overlooking a distant valley, with six or seven gorillas going about their pacific, herbivorous business. "Carl Akeley died right here," Ford said, pointing to a spot in the foreground. "There were two expeditions for the gorilla exhibit. On the first one, they shot the animals and brought the skins to New York, and made the plaster models. Then Akeley went back to Africa to collect the plants, and he died there, of dysentery. He'd said this was his favorite place in the world, so they buried him there—right in that little hollow. But his bones are no longer there. People went back later, and found the grave had been robbed." A fine Walton Ford story, and, naturally, Ford did a painting based on it. Called "Sanctuary" (1998), it depicts the same landscape, with a life-size gorilla in a tree, cradling in his black hand a human skull. "Akeley collected them," Ford explained, "and they collected him right back."

The thylacine triptych isn't finished yet. Ford stopped working on it temporarily and began a painting of mountain lions, for Kasmin to take to Florida for the Art Basel Miami Beach fair in December. (It sold before the fair opened, for four hundred thousand dollars.) The mountain lions were nearly done when I visited his studio in mid-November. Lately, he explained, there had been numerous sightings of these big cats in the Berkshires, "although not one sighting is documented, and there's no evidence—no scat, no tree scratchings, no attacks on pets or joggers. Mountain lions have been extinct in New England for decades." Ford's painting is set in a local cemetery, where several pairs of mountain lions are copulating among the gravestones. "They're making more ghost cats for people to see," he said. His are life-size, and very lifelike.

"I've never had more ideas," Ford said happily. "I've never been better at what I do, so I may as well crank it out." Tom Ford, the designer, has commissioned him to do ten very large paintings for a twenty-foot-square gallery in his home in Santa Fe. The paintings will cover all four walls, and the subjects will be based on the American West. Ford owns several works by Walton, including "Space Monkey," a 2001 watercolor that was inspired by Patti Smith's song of the same title. When Patti Smith came across the picture online, she e-mailed Walton, and he answered, and now they are friends.

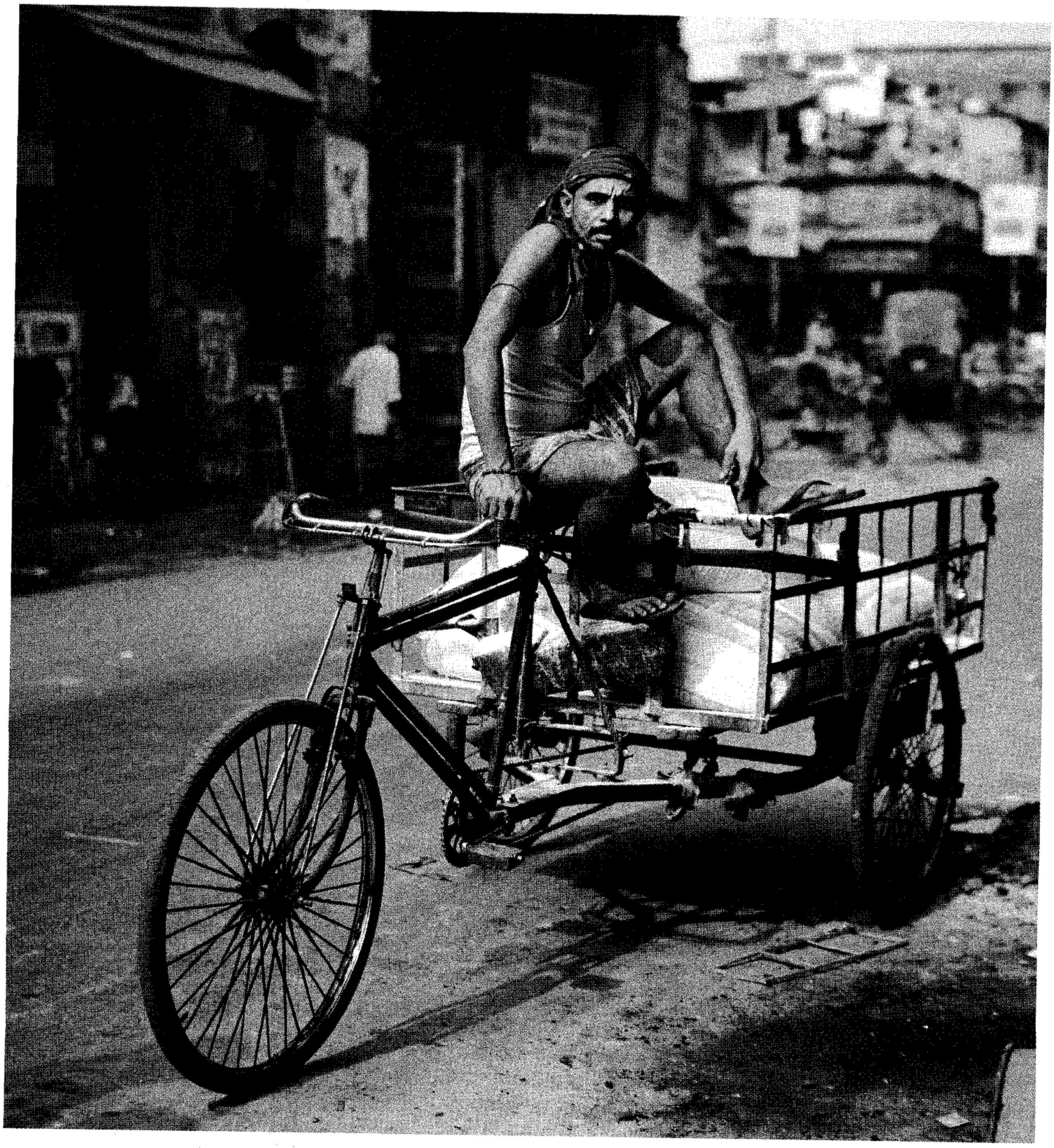
"I feel like we have a shared world, through literature and childhood impulses," Smith told me recently. "I sent him a poem of mine, about the last dodo, and we might do something together with that." Smith thinks Ford's work is on the verge of breaking through into something new, which she sees as "an almost Turner-like violence."

When I asked Ford where he thought his work might be heading, he looked momentarily uncertain. "Oh, crap," he said, massaging his head. "I hope I'm still going to do something more interesting than I'm doing now. I feel like, right now, I'm an interesting minor artist, a footnote in art history, you know? I've got this territory that's my own, and I'm making watercolors that nobody else can make, but I'm not pushing the language of making pictures in any new direction. There's nothing I'm doing that wasn't done better by Géricault. But maybe that will change. Anyway, I'm not there yet." ♦

FICTION

THE ELEPHANT

BY ARAVIND ADIGA



All the employees of the furniture shop had gathered in a semicircle around Mr. Ganesh Pai's table. It was a special day: Mrs. Engineer had come to the shop in person.

She had seen her TV table, and now she was approaching Mr. Pai's desk to finalize the deal.

His face was smeared with sandalwood, and he wore a loose-fitting silk shirt through which a dark triangle of chest hair stuck out. On the wall behind his chair he had hung gold foil images of Lakshmi, goddess of wealth, and the fat elephant god, Ganapati. An incense stick smoked below the images.

Mrs. Engineer sat down slowly at the desk. Mr. Pai reached into his drawer, then held out four red cards to her. Mrs. Engineer paused, bit her lip, and snatched at one of the cards.

"A set of stainless-steel glasses!" Mr. Pai said, showing her the bonus card she had picked. "A truly wonderful gift, Madam. Something you'll treasure for years and years."

Mrs. Engineer beamed. She counted off four hundred-rupee notes, which she put down on the desk before Mr. Pai.

Mr. Pai, moistening the tip of his finger in a small bowl filled with water which he kept on his desk just for this purpose, counted the notes afresh. Then he looked at Mrs. Engineer and smiled, as if expecting something more.

"The rest after delivery," she said, getting up from her chair. "And don't forget to send the bonus gift."

"She may be the wife of the richest man in town, but she's still a stingy old cunt," Mr. Pai said, after seeing her out of the store, and an assistant laughed behind him. He turned and glared at the assistant, a small, dark Tamilian boy.

"Get one of the coolies to deliver it, fast," Mr. Pai said.

The Tamilian boy ran out of the shop. The cycle-cart pullers were in their usual position—lying on their carts, staring into space, smoking *beedis*. Some of them were gazing with dull avarice at the store on the other side of the road, the Ideal Traders Ice Cream Parlor, where fat kids in T-shirts were licking vanilla cones.

CHIARA GOIA

The boy stuck out his index finger and motioned to one of the men.

"Chenayya—your number is up!"

Chenayya pedalled hard. He had been told to take the quick route to Rose Lane, so he had to go over Lighthouse Hill. He struggled to move the cart with the TV table, which was attached to his cycle. Once he was over the hump of the hill, he let the cycle glide. He slowed down on Rose Lane, found the house number, which he had memorized, and rang the bell.

A plump, fair-skinned woman opened the door: Mrs. Engineer herself.

Chenayya brought the TV table into the house and put it down in the spot she indicated.

He went out, and returned with a saw. Mrs. Engineer watched him draw the instrument out at arm's length, and suddenly it seemed enormous: a foot and a half long, with a serrated edge, rusty, but with patches of the original metal-gray color still showing through, like a sculpture of a shark made by a tribal artist.

Chenayya saw the woman's eyes grow large with anxiety. To dispel her fear, he grinned ingratiatingly at her—it was the exaggerated death-mask grin of a person not used to grovelling—then he looked around to figure out where he had left the table.

The legs were not all even. Chenayya closed an eye and examined them one by one; then he began moving the saw over each of the legs, creating a fine dust on the floor. He examined them again, to make sure they were level, and then dropped the saw. He searched his dirty white sarong, which was the only garment on his body, for a relatively clean corner, and wiped the table off.

Mrs. Engineer had not been watching; she had retreated into an inner room. She returned and counted off seven hundred and forty-two rupees.

Hesitating a moment, she added three one-rupee notes to it.

"Give me something more, Madam?" Chenayya blurted. "Give me three more rupees?"

"Six rupees? Nothing doing," she said.

"It's a long way, Madam." He picked up his saw and pointed to his neck. "I had to haul it all that way, Madam, on my cycle-cart. It hurts my neck very much."

"Nothing doing. Get out, or I'll call the police, you thug. Get out, and take your big knife!"

As he left the house, grumbling and sulking, he folded the money into a wad, then tied it into a knot on his sarong. He threw the saw into the cart.

He picked up a rotting banana skin and hung it on the leaves of a neem tree that grew near the gate of the house, so that it would startle the owners when they came out.

He was so pleased with himself for this that he smiled.

About ten minutes later, he was on his bike again, heading back to Umbrella Street. He was cycling, as always, with his butt elevated off the seat, his spine inclined at sixty degrees. Only at traffic intersections did he straighten himself, relax, and ease back into his seat. The road, as he drew near Umbrella Street, was jammed once again; pushing his front wheel into the car ahead of him, Chenayya yelled, "Son of a bitch, move!"

At last, he saw to his right the sign for Ganesh Pai Fan and Furniture Store, and stopped his cycle.

Chenayya wiped his palm against his sarong, pushed the door open, went into the store, and crouched by a corner of Mr. Pai's table. Neither Mr. Pai nor the Tamilian assistant took any notice of him.

His neck was hurting again; he moved it from side to side to relieve the pain.

"Stop doing that."

Mr. Pai motioned for him to hand over the cash.

He moved slowly to the boss man's desk and handed over the notes to Mr. Ganesh Pai, who moistened his finger in the water bowl and counted off seven hundred and forty-two rupees. Chenayya stared at the water bowl; he noticed how its sides were lobed to make them look like lotus petals, and how the artisan had even traced the pattern of a trellis around the bottom of the bowl.

Mr. Pai snapped his fingers. He had tied a rubber band around the notes, and was holding out a palm in Chenayya's direction.

"Two rupees short."

Chenayya undid the knot in the side

of his sarong and handed over two one-rupee notes.

That was the sum he was expected to give Mr. Pai at the end of every trip: one rupee for the dinner he would be given at around nine o'clock, one rupee for the privilege of having been picked to work for Mr. Ganesh Pai.

It would be some time before Chenayya's number was called again, so he walked down the road to a spot where a man was sitting at a desk on the pavement, selling bundles of small rectangular tickets that were as colorful as pieces of candy. He smiled at Chenayya; his fingers began flipping through one of the bundles.

"Yellow?"

"First tell me if my number won last time," Chenayya said. He brought out a dirty piece of paper from the knot on his sarong. The seller took out a newspaper and glanced down at the bottom-right-hand corner.

He read aloud, "Winning Lottery Numbers: 17, 8, 9, 9, 643, 455."

Chenayya had learned enough about English numerals to recognize his own ticket number; he squinted for several moments, and then let the ticket float to the ground.

"People buy for fifteen, sixteen years before they win, Chenayya," the lottery seller said, by way of consolation. "But in the end those who believe always win. That is the way the world works."

"I can't go on this way forever," Chenayya said. "My neck hurts. I can't go on like this."

The lottery seller nodded. "Another yellow ticket?"

Tying the ticket into his bundle, Chenayya staggered back and collapsed on his cart. For a while, he lay like that, feeling not refreshed from the rest but only numb.

Then a finger tapped on his head.

"Number's up, Chenayya."

It was the Tamilian boy from the store.

To be delivered to 54 Rose Lane. He repeated it aloud: "54 Rose Lane."

"Good."

The route took him over Lighthouse Hill again. Halfway up the hill, he alighted and began dragging the cart. The sinews bulged out of his neck like webbing, and, as he inhaled, the air burned through his chest and lungs. You can't go on, his tired limbs and burning chest told him. You can't go on. This was when the sense of resistance to his fate waxed greatest within him, and, as he pushed, the restlessness and anger that had been inside him all day became articulate at last:

You will not break me, motherfuckers! You will never break me!

If the thing to be delivered was something light, like a mattress, he was not allowed to take a cycle-cart; it had to be carried on his head. Repeating the address to the Tamilian boy from the shop, he set off with a slow, light step, like a fat man jogging. In a short while, the weight of the mattress seemed unbearable; it compressed his neck and spine and sent a shaft of pain down his back. He was virtually in a trance.

This morning, he was taking a mattress to the train station. The client turned out to be a North Indian family that was leaving Kittur; the owner, as he had guessed beforehand (from his demeanor—you can tell which of these rich people have a sense of decency and which don't), refused to tip him.

Chenayya stood his ground. "You motherfucker! Give me my money!"

It was a triumph for him: the man relented.

The odors and the noise of the train station made him sick. Outside, he squatted down by the tracks, pulled his sarong up, and held his breath. As he was squatting there, the train roared by. He turned around; he wanted to shit into the faces of the people on the train. Yes, that would be good. As the train thundered by, he forced out the turds into the faces of the passengers.

Next to him, a pig was doing the same thing.

He thought, God, what am I declining into? He crawled behind a bush and finished defecating there.

He closed his eyes.

He looked up and took a deep breath. The sky is clean, he thought. There is purity up there. He tore off a few leaves, wiped his arse with them, then rubbed his left hand against the earth in a bid to neutralize the smell.

At two o'clock, he got his next number: the delivery of a giant stack of boxes to an address in Valencia.

"There's a lot of work today, Chenayya," the Tamilian boy said. "Make sure you go the quick way—over Lighthouse Hill."

He grunted, rose up off his seat, shifted his weight onto the pedals, and was on his way. The rusty iron chain that double-locked the cart to the front wheels of the cycle began to squeal as he rode.

Down the main road, he got stuck in a traffic jam. When he didn't have the cart, he could do something—wiggle into the spaces between cars, climb onto the pavement—but now he could only curse from behind. His neck hurt. The sun seared his back.

Why are some mornings hard, some mornings simple? The other pullers never had "good" or "bad" days; they did their work like machines. Only he had his moods. He looked down, to relieve his neck, and stared at the rusty chain at his feet, coiled around the metal rod that connected the cycle to the cart. Time to oil the chain, he told himself. Must remember.

Uphill again. Leaning forward from his seat, Chenayya was straining hard; the breath went into his lungs like a hot poker. Halfway up the hill, he saw an elephant coming down, with a small bundle of leaves on its back and a mahout poking its ear with an iron rod.

He stopped; he could not believe his eyes. He began to shout at the elephant: "Hey, you, what are you doing with a bundle of twigs? Take this load from me! It's more fitted to your size, you motherfucker!"

Cars honked behind him. The mahout turned and gesticulated at him with his iron rod. A passerby yelled at him not to block traffic.

"What is wrong with this world," he asked the driver of the car behind him, who, irate on the other side of his windshield, was jabbing his horn with the fleshy part of his palm again and again, "when an elephant gets to lounge down the road, doing no work, and a human being has to pull a cart with so much weight on it?"

The drivers behind him honked, and the cacophony grew louder.

"Don't you see something is wrong here?" he shouted. They honked back.

The world was furious at his fury. It wanted him to move out of its path, but he was enjoying being exactly where he was, blocking all these rich and important people.

That evening, there were great streaks of pink in the sky. After the shop closed, the cart pullers moved to the alley behind the store; they took turns buying small bottles of country liquor, which they shared amongst themselves, getting giddy quickly and belting out Kannada film songs off key.

Chenayya never joined them. "You're wasting your money, you idiots!" he sometimes shouted; they jeered back at him.

He would not drink; he would not squander the hard-earned fruits of his labor on alcohol, he had promised himself. Yet the smell of liquor made his mouth water; the good humor and bonhomie of the other pullers made him lonely. He closed his eyes. A tinkling noise made him open them.

Nearby, on the steps of a vacant building, a fat prostitute had come out to ply her trade. She clapped her hands and made music by striking two coins together. A customer came up; they began haggling over the price. The deal was not consummated, and the man left, cursing.

Chenayya, lying in his cart with his feet sticking out, watched the action with a dull grin.

"Hey, Kamala!" he shouted at the prostitute. "Why not give me a chance tonight?"

She looked away and went on clinking the coins together. He stared at her plump breasts, at the dark tip of her cleavage that showed through her blouse, at her garishly painted lips.

He turned his eyes to the sky: he had to stop thinking about sex. Streaks of pink amid the clouds. Isn't there a god, or someone there, Chenayya wondered, watching down on this earth? One evening, at the train station to deliver a parcel, he had noticed a wild Muslim dervish talking to himself in a corner about how the Mahdi, the last of the Imams, would come for this earth, and the evil would face their due. "Allah is the maker of all men," the dervish had mumbled as Chenayya edged closer to listen. "And He observes our hurt, and when we suffer He suffers with us. And He will send, at the end of the days, the Mahdi, on a white horse with a sword of fire, to put the rich in their place and correct all that is wrong with the world."

Chenayya had never forgotten about the Mahdi; whenever he saw a streak of pink in the sky at the end of the day, he thought he could detect some god of fairness watching over the earth and glowering with anger.

Chenayya closed his eyes and heard again the tinkling of coins. He tossed about restlessly, and then covered his face with a rag, so the sun wouldn't sting him awake, and went to sleep. Half an hour later, he woke up with a sharp pain in his ribs. A policeman was jabbing his *lathis* into the bodies of the pullers. A truck was entering this part of the market. All you cycle-cart pullers! Get up and move your carts!

Chenayya spat, and walked a few feet away to urinate against a wall.

Behind him he heard jeers. The other pullers were urinating right where they had slept.

He said nothing to them. Chenayya rarely talked to his fellow cart pullers. He could barely stand the sight of them—the way they bent and grovelled to Mr. Ganesh Pai. Yes, he might do the same, but he was furious, he was angry inside. These fellows who pulled their carts with such big grins seemed incapable of even thinking badly of their employer.

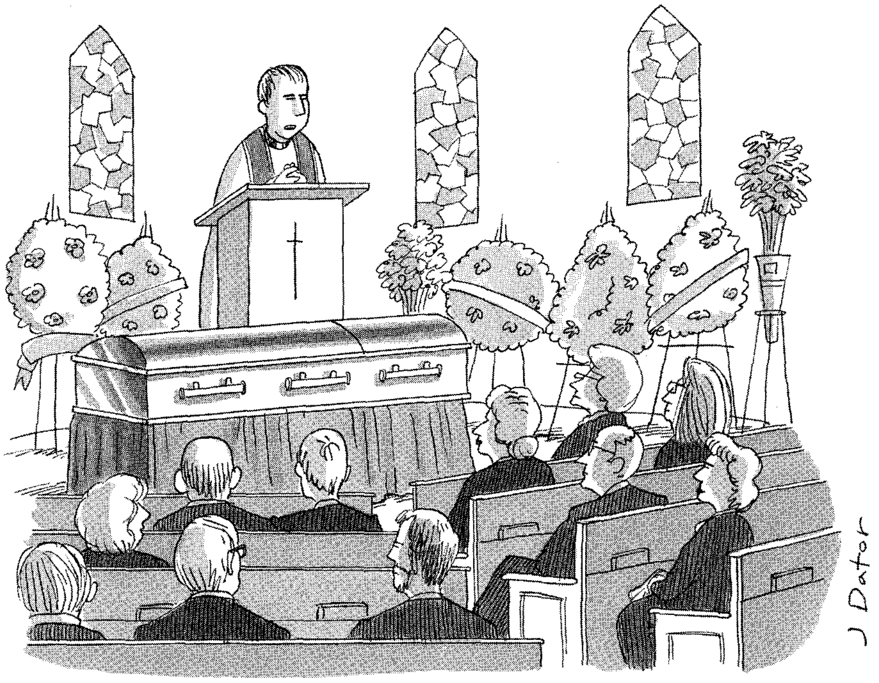
When the Tamilian boy brought out the tea, Chenayya reluctantly rejoined the pullers. He heard them talking, as they did every morning, about the autorickshaws they were going to buy once they got out of here, or the small tea shops they were going to open.

"Think about it," he wanted to say to them. "Just think about it."

Mr. Ganesh Pai allowed them two rupees for each trip, meaning that, at the rate of three trips a day, they were making six rupees. Once you deducted for lotteries, and liquor, you were lucky to save two rupees. Sundays were off, as were Hindu holidays, so by the month's end you had saved only forty or forty-five rupees. A trip to the village, an evening with a whore, an extra-long drinking binge, and your whole month's savings would be dust. Assuming you saved everything you could, you'd be lucky to earn four hundred a year. An autorickshaw would cost twelve, fourteen thousand to buy, a small tea shop four times as much. That meant thirty, thirty-five years of such work before they could do anything else. Did they think their bodies would last that long? Was there a single cart puller over the age of forty around them?

Don't you ever think about such things, you baboons?

Yet, when he had tried once to get



"We will now observe a moment of silently checking our BlackBerrys."

them to understand this, they had refused to demand more collectively. They thought they were lucky: thousands would take their jobs at a moment's notice. He knew they were right, too.

Nevertheless, despite the logic, despite their valid fears, their sheer spinelessness grated on him. That is why, he thought, Mr. Ganesh Pai could be confident that a customer could hand over thousands of rupees in cash and it would all come to him, every last rupee, without the cart puller taking any of it.

Naturally, Chenayya had long planned on stealing the money that a customer gave him. He would take the money and leave town. This much he was certain he would do—someday very soon.

Chenayya felt a tap on his shoulder. It was the Tamilian boy from Mr. Ganesh Pai's shop.

As he went up Lighthouse Hill, as he forced his cart over the hump, his usual sense of exultation was gone entirely.

At every turn of his cycle, the thought intruded itself, undid him, and slowed him down: You are unmaking yourself—destroying your guts and fibre and being! As he was cycling, he was working the wheel of life backward, crushing his muscle and fibre into the pulp from which they were formed in his mother's womb; he was unmaking himself.

All at once, in the middle of traffic, he stopped and got off his cycle, with the simple and clear thought: I can't go on like this.

That evening, the men were huddled around. A man in a blue safari suit, an important, educated man, was asking them questions; he had a small notepad in his hand. He said he had come from Madras.

He asked one of the cart pullers for his age. No one was sure. When he said, "Can you make a rough guess?" they simply nodded. When he said, "Are you eighteen, or twenty, or thirty—you must have some idea," they simply nodded again.

"Tell me, who are you?" Chenayya, who had kept his distance, asked. "Why are you asking us all these questions?"

He said that he was a journalist, and the cart pullers were impressed. He worked for an English-language newspaper in Madras, and that impressed them even more. Then he wanted to know what they were eating. While they waited expectantly, he made a list of everything they ate every day. At the end, with a wide, almost triumphant grin, he declared, "The work you are doing exceeds the amount of calories you take in. Every day, every trip you take—you are slowly killing yourselves."

"Arr, we found your luggage, Captain."

He held out his notepad, with its squiggles and zigzags and numbers, as proof of his claim.

"Why don't you do something else, like work in a factory? Anything else? Why don't you learn to read and write?"

Chenayya jumped off his cart.

"Don't patronize us, you son of a bitch!" he shouted. "Those who are born poor in this country are fated to die poor. There is no hope for us, and no need of pity—certainly not from you, who never lift a hand to help us. I spit on you. I spit on your newspaper. Nothing ever changes. Look at me." He held his palms out. "I am twenty-nine years old. I am already bent and black and twisted like this. If I live to forty, what is my fate? To be a twisted black rod of a man. You think I need your notepad and your English to tell me this? You keep us like this, you people from the cities, you rich fucks. It is in your interest to treat us like cattle! You English-speaking fuck!"

The man put his notepad away. He looked at the ground, and seemed to be groping for a response.

Chenayya felt a tap on his shoulder. It was the Tamilian boy.

"Stop talking so much! Your number has come up!"

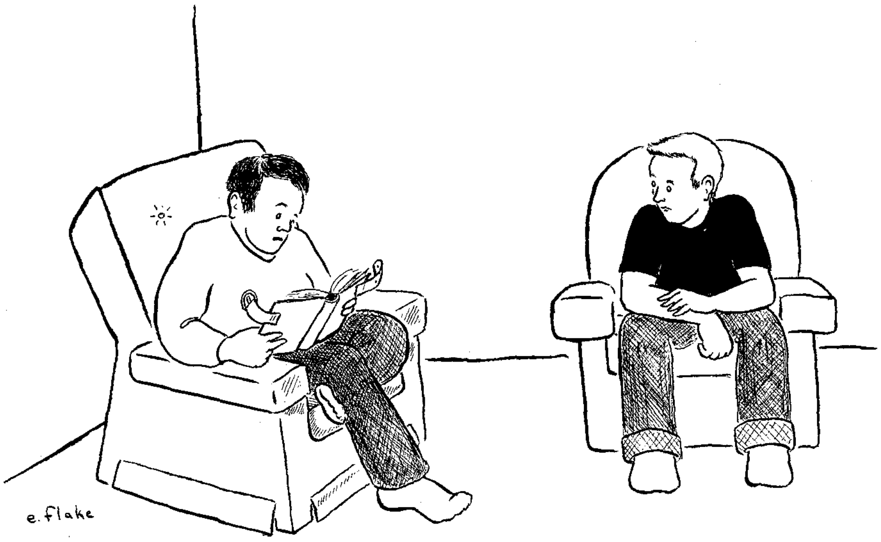
Some of the other cart pullers began chuckling, as if to say, Serves you right.

Strangely, the man from Madras was not grinning; he had turned his face away, as if he were ashamed at what Chenayya had said.

Why don't you do something, work in a factory, anything, to improve yourself? After all, for years you have taken things to the gates of factories—it is just a question of getting inside. The next day, he went to the factory. He saw thousands of men going in for work, and he thought, What a fool I have been, never even to have tried to get work here.

He sat down, and none of the guards asked any questions, thinking he was waiting to pick up some goods.

He waited till noon, and then a man



"Man, you can really learn a lot about somebody by reading her diary."

came out. From the number of people following him, Chenayya thought, he must be the big man. He went running past the guard and got down on his knees: "Sir. I want to work."

The man stared at him. The guards came running up to drag Chenayya back, but the big man said, "I have two thousand workers, and not one of them wants to work, and here this man is, down on his knees, begging for work. That's the attitude we need to move this country forward."

He pointed a finger at Chenayya.

"You won't get offered any contract. Understand. Day by day."

"Anything, anything you want."

"What kind of work can you do?"

"Anything, anything you want."

"All right, come back tomorrow. We don't need a coolie right now."

"O.K., sir."

The big man took out a pack of cigarettes and lit one.

"Hear what this man has to say," he said, when a group of other men, who were also smoking, gathered around.

And Chenayya repeated that he would do anything, under any conditions, for any sort of pay.

"Say it again!" the big man ordered, and another group of men came and listened to Chenayya.

That evening, he went back to Mr. Ganesh Pai's shop and shouted at the other workers, "I've found a real job, you motherfuckers. I'm out of here."

The Tamilian boy alone cautioned him. "Chenayya, why don't you wait a day and make sure the other job is good? Then you can quit here."

"Nothing doing, I quit!" he yelled, and walked away.

The next day at dawn, he was back at the front gate of the factory. "I want to see the manager," he said, shaking the bars of the gate for attention. "He told me to come today."

The guard, who was reading the newspaper, looked up fiercely.

"Get out!"

"Don't you remember me? I came—"

"Get out!"

He waited near the gate. After an hour, it opened, and a car with tinted windows pulled out. Running alongside the car, he banged on the window. "Sir! Sir! Sir!" A dozen hands seized him from behind; he was shoved to the ground and kicked.

When he wandered back to Mr. Pai's shop in the evening, the Tamilian boy was waiting for him. He said, "I never told the boss you quit. I knew you'd come back."

The other pullers did not tease Chenayya that night. One of them left him a bottle of liquor, still half full.

The rain fell down without stop. Chenayya rode his cycle through the rain, splashing down the road. He wore a long white plastic sheet over his body, like a shroud.

When it rained, the road turned into mud; the mud turned into wet clay. This was the most dangerous time for a puller. Wherever the road had broken up into a pothole, he had to slow down to avoid tipping his cycle-cart over.

The pain in his neck began biting again. I can't go on like this, he thought.

From across the road, one of the other pullers, a young one, drove up side by side with Chenayya. "Have to deliver this fast and get back," he said. "Boss man said he's depending on me to get back within an hour." He grinned, and Chenayya wanted to ram his fist into the grin. God, how full of suckers the world is, he thought, counting to ten to calm himself down. How happy this idiot seems to be, to destroy himself with overwork. You baboon! he wanted to shout. You and all the others! Baboons!

He put his head down, and suddenly it seemed a great strain to move the cart.

"You've got no air in one tire!" the baboon shouted. "You'll have to stop!" He grinned one of his baboon grins, and rode on.

Stop? Chenayya thought. No, that is what a baboon would do: not me. Putting his head down, he pedalled on, forcing his flat tire along: Move, motherfucker!

Move!

And the cart, slowly and noisily, its old wheels and its unoiled chains rattling, moved.

It is raining now, Chenayya thought, lying in his cart that night, with the plastic sheet over his head. That means we are through half of this year. It must be June or July. I must be nearly thirty now.

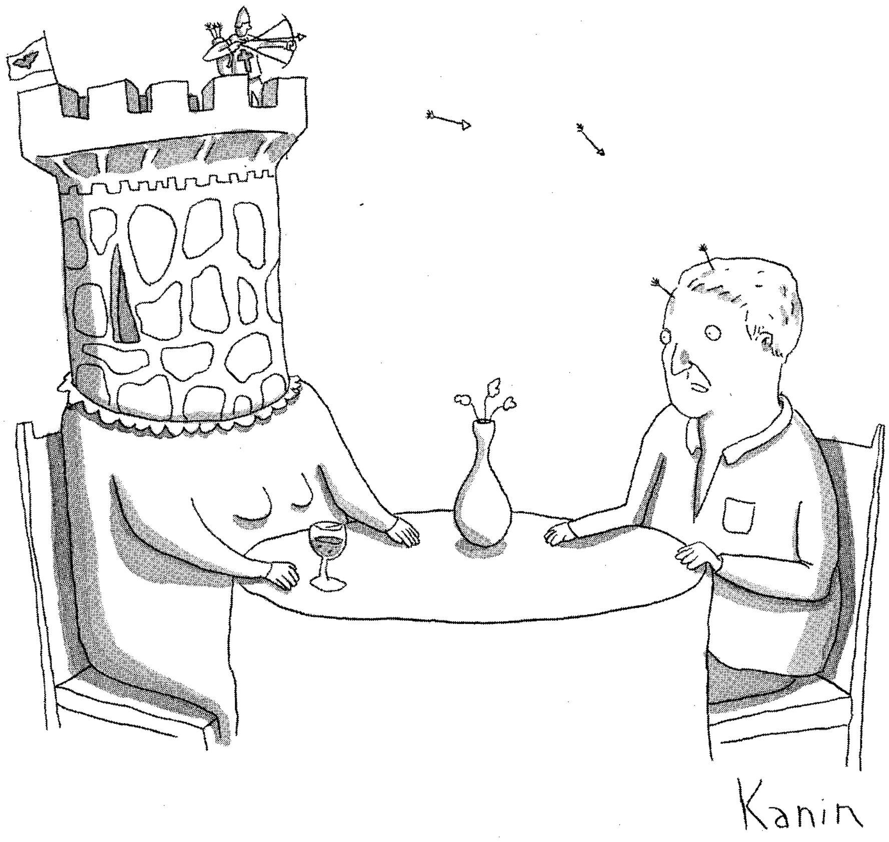
He pulled the sheet down and lifted his head to relieve the pain in his neck. He could not believe his eyes: even in this rain, some motherfucker was flying a kite! As if taunting the heavens, the lightning, to strike them.

In the morning, he went to the lottery seller. A boy, a total stranger, was sitting at the desk, kicking his legs merrily.

"What happened to the old fellow?"

"Gone."

"Gone where?"



"This date isn't going well, is it?"

"Gone into politics."

The boy described what had happened to the old seller. He had joined the campaign of a B.J.P. candidate for the corporation elections. His candidate had won. Now he sat on the veranda of the politician's house. If you wanted to see the politician, you paid him fifty rupees first.

"That's the politician's life—it's the fastest way to get rich these days," the boy said. He flipped through his pieces of colored paper. "What'll you have, uncle? A yellow? Or a green?"

Chenayya turned around without buying any of the colored papers.

Why, he thought at night, can't that be me—the fellow who goes into politics to get rich? He did not want to forget what he had just heard, so he pinched himself sharply around the joint of his foot.

It was Sunday again. The free day. Chenayya woke up when it got too hot, then brushed his teeth lazily, looking up to see if kites were flying in the sky. The other pullers were going to see the new Hoyka temple that the Member of Parliament had opened, just for Hoykas, with their own Hoyka deity and Hoyka priests.

"Aren't you coming, Chenayya?" the others shouted at him.

"What has any god ever done for me?" he shouted back. They giggled at his recklessness.

Baboons, he thought, as he lay down in his cart again. Going to worship some idol in a temple, thinking it'll make them rich.

Baboons!

He lay with an arm over his face. Then he heard the tinkling of two coins.

"Come over, Kamala!" he called out to the prostitute, who was in her usual spot, playing with coins. When he taunted her for the sixth time, she snapped, "Get lost, or I'll call Brother."

At this reference to the don who controlled the hookers in this part of town, Chenayya sighed, and turned over in his cart.

He thought, Perhaps it is time for me to get married.

He had lost contact with all his relatives. Plus, he did not want to get married. Bring children—into what future? That was the most baboonlike thing the other pullers did, he thought: to procreate, as if to say they were satisfied with their fate, they were happy to replenish the world that had consigned them to this task.

There was nothing in him but anger, and if he married he thought he would lose his anger.

As he turned around in his cart, he noticed the welt on his foot. He frowned, trying hard to remember how he had got it.

The next morning, on the way back from a delivery, he took a by-route and went to the office of the Congress Party on Umbrella Street. He crouched on the veranda of the office and waited for someone important-looking to come out.

There was a sign outside, with an image of Indira Gandhi raising her hand, and the slogan "Mother Indira will protect the poor." He smirked.

Were they completely nuts? Did they really think that anyone would expect a politician to protect the poor?

But then he thought, Maybe this woman, Indira Gandhi, was someone special; maybe they were right. In the end, she was shot dead, wasn't she? That seemed evidence to him that she had wanted to help the world. Suddenly, it seemed that the world did have some good-hearted people who wanted to help the poor. He felt he had cut himself off from all of that with his excessive bitterness.

He saw a man in loose white clothes coming in, followed by two or three hangers-on. Chenayya rushed up to him and got down on his knees, his palms pressed together.

For the next week, whenever he knew his number was not going to be called for a while, he went around on his cycle, sticking up posters of the Congress candidates in all the Muslim-dominated streets of the town, shouting, "Vote for Congress—the party of Muslims! Defeat the B.J.P.!"

The week passed. The elections were over, the results were declared. Chenayya rode his cycle to the Congress Party office, parked it outside, went to the door-keeper, and asked to see the candidate.

"He's a busy man now—just wait out here a moment," the doorkeeper said. He put a hand on Chenayya's back. "We would never have won except for your work, Chenayya. The B.J.P. defeated us everywhere else, but you got the Muslims to vote!"

Chenayya beamed. He waited outside the Party headquarters and watched the cars drive up and disgorge rich and important men, who hurried in to see the candidate. He saw them and thought, This is where I will wait to collect money from the rich. Not much. Just five rupees from everyone who comes to see the candidate. That should do.

His heart beat with excitement. An hour passed.

Chenayya decided to go into the waiting room, to make sure that he, too, got to see the man when he finally came out. There were benches and stools in the room; a dozen other men were waiting. Chenayya saw an empty spot and wondered if he should sit down. Why not? He had worked, too. He was about to sit down on a bench when the doorkeeper said, "Use the floor, Chenayya."

Another hour passed. Finally, the doorkeeper came to him with a box full of round yellow sweets. "Take one."

Chenayya took a sweet, almost put it in his mouth, and then put it back. "I don't want a sweet." His voice rose quickly. "I put up posters all over this town! Now I want to see the big man! I want to get a job with—"

The doorkeeper slapped him.

I am the biggest fool here, Chenayya thought, back in his alley. The other pullers were lying in their carts, snoring hard. It was late at night, and he was the only one who could not sleep. I am the biggest fool. I am the biggest baboon here.

On the way to his first assignment the next morning, there was another traffic jam on Umbrella Street—the biggest one he had ever seen.

When he finally got to his destination, he found that the owner of the house was a European. He insisted on helping to unload the furniture, which confused Chenayya terribly. The whole time, he spoke in English, as if he expected everyone in Kittur to be familiar with the language.

He held his hand out at the end, shook Chenayya's, and gave him a fifty-rupee note.

Chenayya was in a panic—where was he expected to get change? He tried to explain, but the European just grinned and closed the door.

Then he understood. He bowed deeply to the closed door.

Buying four lottery tickets, he broke the note into forty-six one-rupee notes; stuffing forty of them near his groin, he gave the six to the shopkeeper.

He came back with a bottle of liquor, and he saw the other cart pullers staring at him.

"Where did you get money for that, Chenayya?"

"None of your business."

He drank the bottle dry, then went over to the liquor shop and bought another bottle. When he woke the next morning, he realized he had spent his money on liquor.

All of it.

He put his face in his hands and began to cry.

He went to drink water from a faucet.

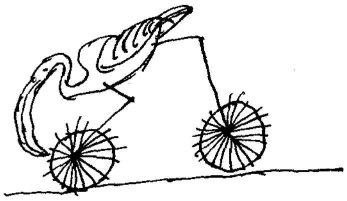
He could not switch off his mind. Like the faucet, it dripped. Think, think, think. He passed a statue of Gandhi, and he began thinking again. Gandhi dressed like a poor man—he dressed as Chenayya did. But what did Gandhi do for the poor?

Did Gandhi even exist? he wondered. These things—India, the River Ganga, the world beyond India—were they even real?

How would he ever know?

Only one level of society was lower than him: the beggars. Just one slide, and he would be down with them, he thought. One accident. And that would be him. How did the others deal with this? They did not. They preferred not to think.

When he stopped at an intersection that night, an old beggar put his hands in front of Chenayya. He turned his face away and cycled down the road to Mr. Ganesh Pai's shop.



The next morning, he was going over the hill again, with five cardboard boxes piled up one above the other in his cart, thinking, Because we acquiesce. Because we do not dare leave with that wad of fifty thousand rupees—because we know other poor people will catch us and drag us before the rich man. Because we dare not kill the rich, out of fear of their police. We poor have built the prison around ourselves.

In the evening, he lay down exhausted. The others had built a fire. Someone would come and give him some rice. He was the hardest worker, so the boss man had let it be known that he ought to be fed regularly.

He saw two dogs humping. Life is so simple for them, he thought. It was a kind of release. There was no passion in them at all. That is all I want to do right now. Hump something. Instead of humping, I have to lie here, thinking.

The prostitute sat on the steps. "Let me come up," he said. She did not look at him; she shook her head.

"Just one time. I'll pay you next time."

"Get out of here, or I'll call Brother," she said. He gave in; he bought a small bottle of liquor, and he began drinking.

Why do I think so much? My thoughts are like thorns inside my head; I want them out. And even when I drink they're there. I wake up in the night, my throat burning, and I find all the thoughts still in my head.

He was awake, lying in his cart. He was sure he had been hounded by the rich even in his dreams, because he woke up furious and sweating. Then he heard the noise of coitus close to him. He saw another cart puller humping the prostitute. Right next to him, it went on. He wondered: Why not me? Why not me? He knew the fellow had no money—so she was doing it out of charity. Why not me?

Every sigh, every groan of the coupling pair was like a chastisement. Chenayya got off his cart, looked around till he found a puddle of cow dung on the ground, and scooped up a handful. He flung the shit at the lovers. There was a cry; he rushed up to them, and dabbed

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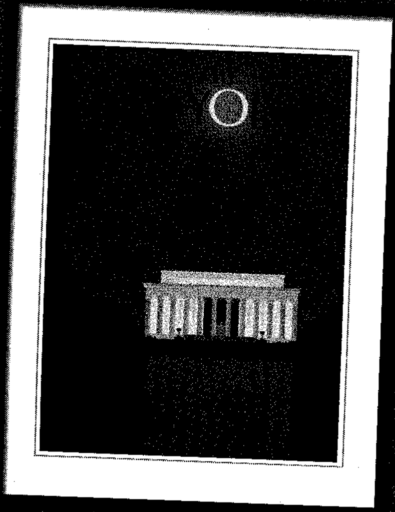
REFLECTION

by Bob Staake
Issue date: November 17, 2008



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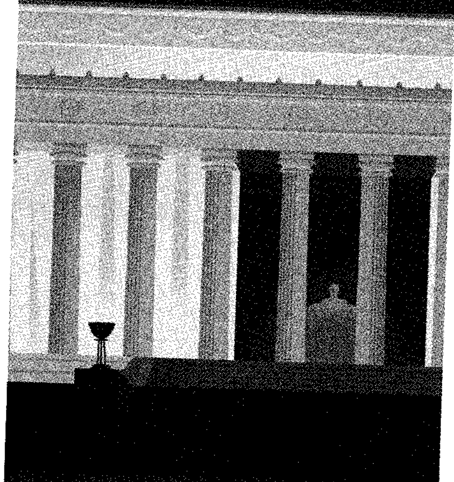

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the whore's face with shit. He put his shit-smeared fingers into her mouth, and kept them there, even though she bit them; the harder she bit the more he enjoyed it, and he kept his fingers there until the other pullers descended on him and dragged him away.

One day, he got an assignment that took him out of the city limits, into Bajpe; he was delivering a doorframe to a construction site.

"There used to be a big coconut grove here," one of the construction workers told him. "But now that's all that's left." He pointed to a distant clump of green.

Chenayya looked at the man, and asked, "Is there any work here for me?"

On his way back, he took a detour off the road and went out to the patch of green. When he got there, he left his bike and walked around; seeing a high rock, he climbed up and looked at the trees around him. Yes, he could live out here. If only he had a little food, what more would he want? His aching muscles could be rested. He put his head down on the rock and looked at the sky.

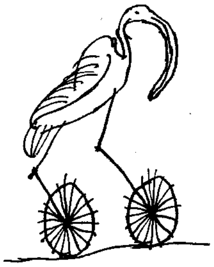
It was nighttime when he cycled back. To get to the shop faster, he took the route down over Lighthouse Hill.

As he was descending, he saw a red light and then a green light attached to the back of a large black cloud moving down the road.

It was the elephant he had seen earlier, only now there were red and green traffic lights tied with string to its rump.

"What's the meaning of this?" he shouted to the mahout.

He shouted back, "Well, I have to make sure no one bumps into us from behind at night—there are no lights anywhere!"



Chenayya threw his head back and laughed—it was the funniest thing he had ever seen, an elephant with traffic lights on its rump.

"They didn't pay me," the mahout said. He had tied the beast to the side of the road and was chatting to Chenayya. He had some peanuts with him, and he didn't want to eat them alone, so he was glad to split a few with Chenayya.

"They made me take their kid on a ride, and they didn't pay me. You should have seen them drink and drink. And they wouldn't pay me fifty rupees, which was all I asked."

The mahout slapped the side of his elephant. "After all that Rani did for them—"

"That's the way of the world," Chenayya said.

"Then it's a rotten world." The mahout chewed a few more peanuts. "A rotten world." He slapped the side of his elephant again. Chenayya looked at the beast.

The behemoth's eyes were gazing sidelong at him; they glistened darkly, almost as if they were tearing. The beast also seemed to be saying, "Things should not be this way."

The mahout pissed against the wall, turning his head up, arching his back, and exhaling in relief, as if it were the best thing he had done all day.

Chenayya kept looking at the elephant, its sad wet eyes. "I am sorry I ever cursed you, brother," he said aloud as he rubbed its trunk.

The mahout stood near the wall he had just pissed on, watching Chenayya talking to the elephant, a sense of apprehension growing within him.

Outside the ice-cream shop, two kids were licking ice creams and staring right at Chenayya. He was sprawled on his cart, dead tired after another day's work.

"Don't you see me?" Chenayya wanted to shout out over the traffic. His stomach was grumbling; he was tired and hungry, and there was still an hour before the Tamilian boy from Mr. Ganesh Pai's shop would bring out dinner.

One of the kids across the street turned away, as if the fury in the cart puller's eyes had become obvious. But the other one, a fat light-skinned fellow, stayed put, sliding his tongue up and down his ice cream, staring nonchalantly at Chenayya.

Don't you have any shame, any sense of decency, you fat fuck?

He thought he would black out in anger, and turned around in his cart and began talking aloud to calm his nerves.

“Maker of all men, why have you . . .”

His gaze fell on the rusty saw lying in his cart. “What stops me now,” he said aloud, “from crossing the street and slashing that rich motherfucker into shreds?”

Just saying it made him feel more powerful.

A finger began tapping on his shoulder. If that’s the fat motherfucker with his ice cream, I will pick up that saw and slice him in two, I swear to God.

It was the Tamilian assistant from the store.

“Your number has come up, Chenayya.”

He took his cart to the door of the store, where the boy handed him a small package wrapped in newspaper and tied with white string.

“It’s to the same place you went a while back to deliver the TV table. Mrs. Engineer’s house. We forgot to send the bonus gift, and she’s been complaining.”

“Oh, no,” he groaned. “She doesn’t tip at all. She’s a complete cunt.”

“You have to go, Chenayya. Your number came up.”

He cycled there slowly. At every intersection and traffic light, he looked at the saw in his cart.

Mrs. Engineer opened the door herself. She said she was on the phone, and told him to wait outside.

“The food at the Lions Club is so fattening,” he heard her saying. “I’ve put on ten kilos in the past year.”

He grabbed the saw and went in. She had her back to him; he saw the whiteness of her flesh peeping out in

space bet

somewhere, and slammed the door.

There was a startled meow. A cat was sitting up on a branch of the tree, watching him closely. How beautiful its eyes were, he thought. This wonderful creature was part of that world, like a small jewel that had fallen off the throne, a hint of a world of beauty beyond his knowledge and reach.

He stretched out his arms for it, and it came to him.

“Kitty, kitty,” he said, stroking its fur slowly. It wriggled about in his arms, restless already.

Somewhere, I hope, a poor man will strike a blow against the world, Chenayya thought. Because there is no god watching over the world. There is no one coming to release us from the jail in which we have locked ourselves.

He wanted to tell all this to the cat; maybe it could tell it to another cart puller, the one who would be brave enough to strike the blow.

He sat down by the wall slowly, still holding on to the cat and stroking its fur. Maybe I can take you along, kitty. How would he feed it? It had found some way to survive here, this cat; it was better off for being left on its own, so he released it again. He sat with his back to the wall and watched the cat move around, padding cautiously up to a car and then slinking under it. He was craning his neck to see what it was doing down there when he heard a shout from high above. It was Mrs. Engineer, yelling at him from the top of her mansion: “I know what you’re up to, thug—I can read your mind! You won’t get another rupee from me! Get

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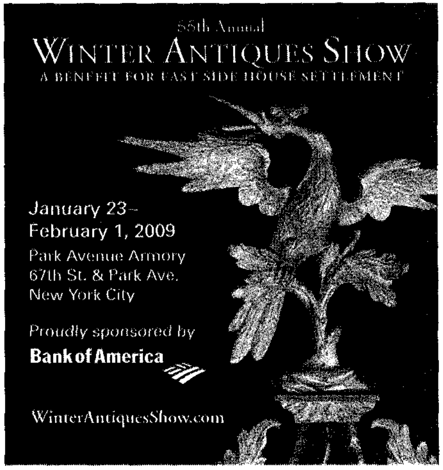
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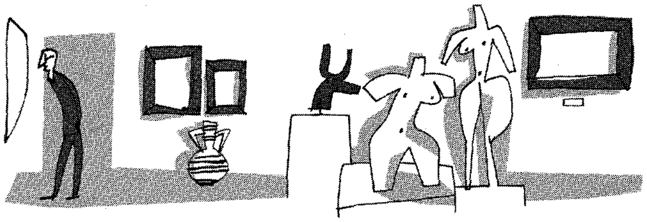

A CRITIC AT LARGE

BACK ISSUES

The day the newspaper died.

BY JILL LEPORE

The newspaper is dead. You can read all about it online, blog by blog, where the digital gloom over the death of an industry often veils, if thinly, a pallid glee. The Newspaper Death Watch, a Web site, even has a column titled "R.I.P." Or, hold on, maybe the newspaper isn't quite dead yet. At its funeral, wild-eyed mourners spy signs of life. The newspaper stirs!

The last time the American newspaper business got this gothic was 1765, just after the first gothic novel, Horace Walpole's "The Castle of Otranto," was published, in London, and, in an unrelated development, Parliament decided to levy on the colonies a new tax, requiring government-issued stamps on pages of printed paper—everything from indenture agreements to bills of credit to playing cards. The tax hit printers hard, at a time when printers were also the editors of newspapers, and sometimes their chief writers, too. The Stamp Act—the "fatal *Black-Act*," one printer called it—was set to go into effect on November 1, 1765. Beginning that day, printers were to affix stamps to their pages and to pay tax collectors a half-penny for every half sheet—amounting, ordinarily, to a penny for every copy of every issue of every newspaper—and a two-shilling tax on every advertisement. Printers insisted that they could not bear this cost. It would spell the death of the newspaper.

On October 10, 1765, an Annapolis printer changed his newspaper's title to the *Maryland Gazette, Expiring*. Its motto: "In uncertain Hopes of a Resurrection to Life again." Later that month, the printer of the *Pennsylvania Journal* replaced his newspaper's masthead with a death's-head and framed his front page with a thick black border in the shape of a gravestone. "Adieu, Adieu," the *Journal* whispered. On October 31st, the *New-Hampshire Gazette* appeared with black mourning borders and, in a column on page 1, lamented its own demise: "I must Die!" The *Connecticut Courant* quoted the book of Samuel: "Tell it not in Gath! publish it not in Askalon!" The newspaper is dead!

Or, then as now, not quite dead yet. "Before I make my Exit," the *New-Hampshire Gazette* told its readers, "I will recount over some of the many good Deeds I have done, and how useful I have been, and still may be, provided my Life should be spar'd; or I might hereafter revive again." The list of deeds ran to three columns. Nothing good in the world had ever happened but that a printer set it in type. "Without this Art of communicating to the Public, how dull and melancholy must all the intelligent Part of Mankind appear?" But, besides the settling over the land of a pall of dullness and melancholy, what else happens when a newspaper dies? In one allegory published during the Stamp Act crisis, a tearful LIBERTY cries to her dying brother, GAZETTE, "Unless thou revivest quickly, I shall also perish with thee! In our Lives we were not divided; in our Deaths we shall not be separated!"

In the eighteenth century, the death of a newspaper signalled the death of liberty. What it signals now is harder to know, especially because there's death, and then there's death. If, one day, ink-and-print is dead and gone, newspapers will endure, wraiths of ether. The newspaper didn't stay dead in the age of the American Revolution, either. Soon enough, it rose from its inky grave. Two months after that first Annapolis paper expired, a New York newspaper reported a sighting: "The APPARITION of the late Maryland Gazette, which is not Dead, but only Sleeping."

That ghost story—the fate of the undead newspaper in Revolutionary America—bears telling. Maybe if we knew more about the founding hacks, we'd have a better idea of what we will have lost when the last newspaper rolls off the presses. If the newspaper, at least as a thing printed on paper and delivered to your door, has a doomsday, it may be coming soon. Not so soon as weeks or months, but not so far off as decades, either. The end, apparently, really is near. That makes this a good time to ask: what was the beginning about?

Newspapers date to the sixteenth century; they started as newsletters and news books, sometimes printed, sometimes copied by hand, and sent from one place to another, carrying word of trade and politics. The word "newspaper" didn't enter the English language until the sixteen-sixties. Venetians sold news for a coin called a gazzetta. The Germans read *Zeitungen;* the French *nouvelles;* the English intelligencers. The London *Gazette* began in 1665. Its news was mostly old, foreign, and unreliable.

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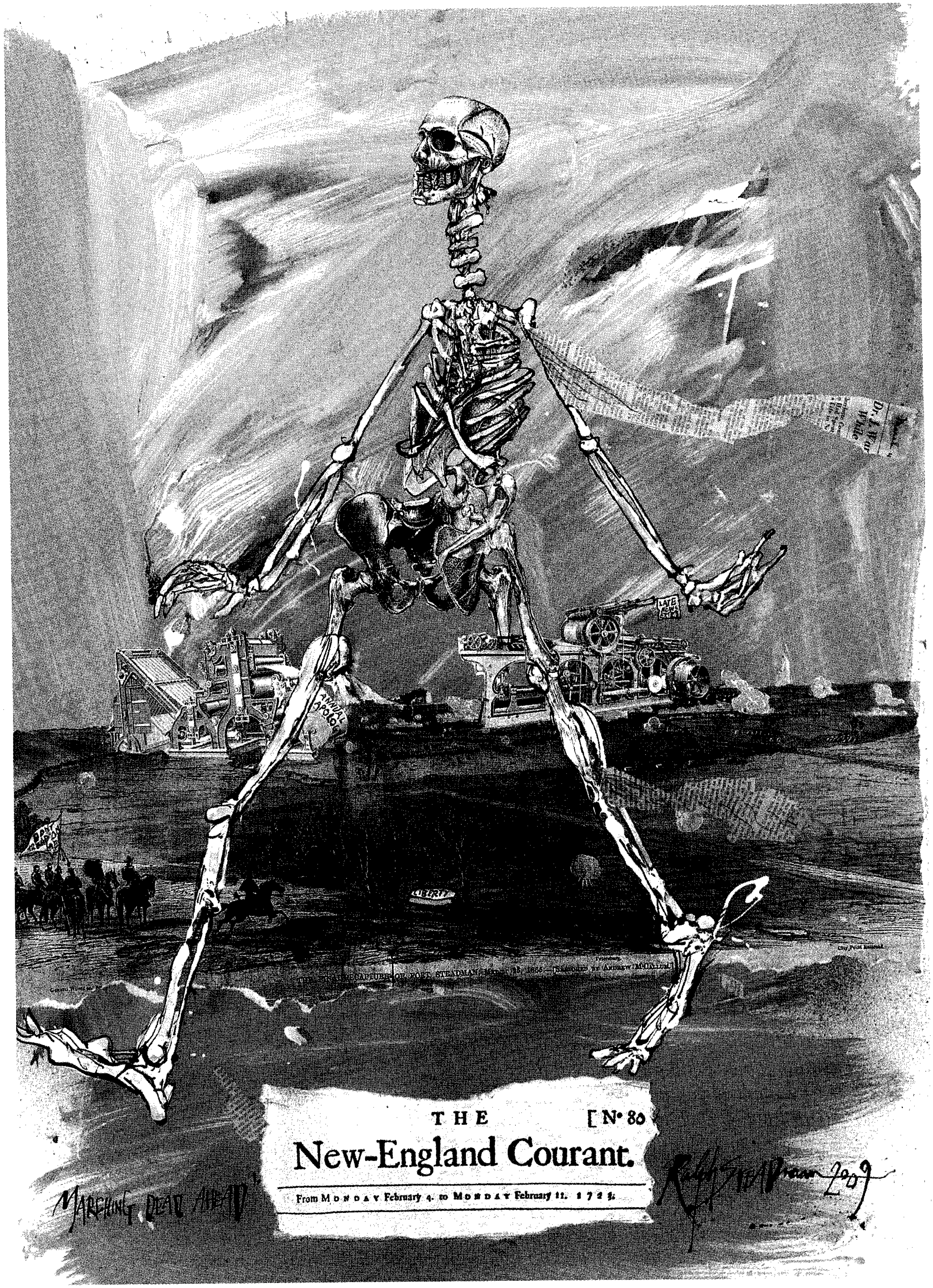
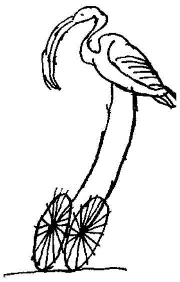

THE [Nº 80
New-England Courant.
From MONDAY February 4. to MONDAY February 11. 1723.
MARCHING DEAD AHEAD
LIBERTY
Ralph Steadman 2009

Colonial newspapers, burdened by a new tax, floridly staged their demise. Liberty, they warned, would perish with them.

authority"—endorsed by ecclesiastics—lasted from 1704 till 1776. In 1719, two more Colonial papers began printing: the Boston *Gazette* and, out of Philadelphia, the *American Weekly Mercury.* (Nearly every early American newspaper was issued weekly; it took sixteen hours to set the type for a standard four-page paper.) But James Franklin's *New-England Courant,* launched in 1721, in Boston, marks the real birth of the American newspaper. It was the first unlicensed paper in the colonies—published without authority—and, while it lasted, it was also, by far, the best. The *Courant* contained political essays, opinion, satire, and some word of goings on. Franklin was the first newspaperman in the world to report the results of a legislative vote count. The Boston *News-Letter* contained, besides the shipping news, tiresome government pronouncements, letters from Europe, and whatever smattering of local news was bland enough to pass the censor. Franklin had a different editorial policy: "I hereby invite all Men, who have Leisure, Inclination and Ability, to speak their Minds with Freedom, Sense and Moderation, and their Pieces shall be welcome to a Place in my Paper."

Not long after Franklin started printing the *Courant,* he hired his little brother as an apprentice. Decades later, when an aging Benjamin Franklin wrote his autobiography, he painted his brother James as a brute, in order to make his own Hogarthian story, the apprentice's progress, a metaphor for the colonists' growing irritation with parliamentary rule. James's "harsh and tyrannical Treatment," Franklin wrote, had served as "a means of impressing me with that Aversion to arbitrary Power that has stuck to me thro' my whole Life." Franklin ran away. He might have titled this chapter of his autobiography "Wherein the Bridling Apprentice Pursues His Independence." It is just the kind of story that clever people tell about their lives: meaningful, useful, and, quite possibly, not altogether true.



Whether or not James Franklin was a hard master, he was, as a printer, bold unto recklessness. He set as his task the toppling of the Puritan theocracy, and nearly managed it. A fuming Cotton Mather dubbed Franklin and his writers the Hell-Fire Club and called his newspaper "A Wickedness never parallel'd any where upon the Face of the Earth!" Undeterred—more likely, spurred on—Franklin printed, in the pages of his paper, essay after essay about the freedom of the press. "To anathematize a Printer for publishing the different Opinions of Men is as injudicious as it is wicked," the *Courant* argued. For this, and much more—and especially for printing a profile of Mather, an "Essay against Hypocrites"—Franklin was thrown in jail, twice. In 1723, a legislative committee charged with investigating the *Courant* reported, "The Tendency of the Said paper is to Mock Religion, & bring it into Contempt, That the Holy Scriptures are therein profanely abused, that the Reverend and faithful Ministers of the Gospell are injuriously Reflected on, His Majesties Government affronted, and the peace and good Order of his Majesties Subjects of this Province disturbed." Authorities ordered Franklin to submit the *Courant* to review or stop printing it. But no one said that someone else couldn't print it. A notice in the next issue claimed that the paper was "Printed and Sold by BENJAMIN FRANKLIN in Queen Street." As Benjamin Franklin later fondly recalled, "I had the Management of the Paper, and I made bold to give our Rulers some Rubs in it."

Giving their rulers some rubs was what eighteenth-century printers did best, as Marcus Daniel recounts in "Scandal & Civility: Journalism and the Birth of American Democracy" (Oxford; $28). Standards of journalistic objectivity date to the nineteenth century. Before then, the whole point was to have a point of view. "The Business of Printing has chiefly to do with Men's Opinions," Benjamin Franklin wrote, in his "Apology for Printers," in 1731, after he started printing the *Pennsylvania Gazette,* in Philadelphia. (Franklin proposed printing a one-size-fits-all "Apology" annually, to save himself the labor of apologizing every time he offended someone.) Franklin's job, as he saw it, wasn't to find out facts. It was to publish a sufficient range of opinion: "Printers are educated in the Belief, that when Men differ in Opinion, both Sides ought equally to have the Advantage of being heard by the Publick; and that when Truth and Error have fair Play, the former is always an overmatch for the latter."

Often, truth did out. In 1735, John Peter Zenger, the German-immigrant printer of the *New-York Weekly Journal,* was jailed for seditious libel for printing essays pointing out that New York's governor, William Cosby, was an avaricious scoundrel. (Zenger didn't write those essays; he just printed them.) Zenger's dazzling lawyer, Andrew Hamilton, managed to get the printer acquitted by arguing that what Zenger printed was true—Cosby really was a blackguard—even though truth, before the Zenger case, had never been allowed as a defense against libel.

Boston's Benjamin Edes gave his rulers some rubs, too. In 1755, Edes, with his lacklustre partner, John Gill, took over the failing Boston *Gazette.* The son of a Charlestown hatter, Edes was not a man of means. He was once City Scavenger. Two years after Edes started printing the *Gazette,* Boston's selectmen scolded him: "you have printed Such Pamphlets & such things in your News Papers as reflect grossly upon the received religious principles of this People which is very Offensive . . . we therefore now Inform you if you go on printing things of this Nature you must Expect no more favours from Us." Edes could have done with Franklin's handy-dandy "Apology." Instead, he was left to issue a vague and impossible promise that he would in the future "publish nothing that shall give any uneasiness to any Persons whatever."

What would the point of that have been? Edes didn't stop. In the seventeen-sixties, his Boston *Gazette,* once the scourge of pious selectmen, became the organ of the patriot opposition. John and Samuel Adams, James Otis, Jr., Joseph Warren—Boston's self-styled Sons of Liberty—all wrote for Edes's paper; Paul Revere engraved its masthead. Edes wrote for the *Gazette,* too, though his prose flickered but dimly. But Edes, like all his writers, knew how to sling mud, especially at royally appointed governors, British soldiers, and tax collectors. Tory

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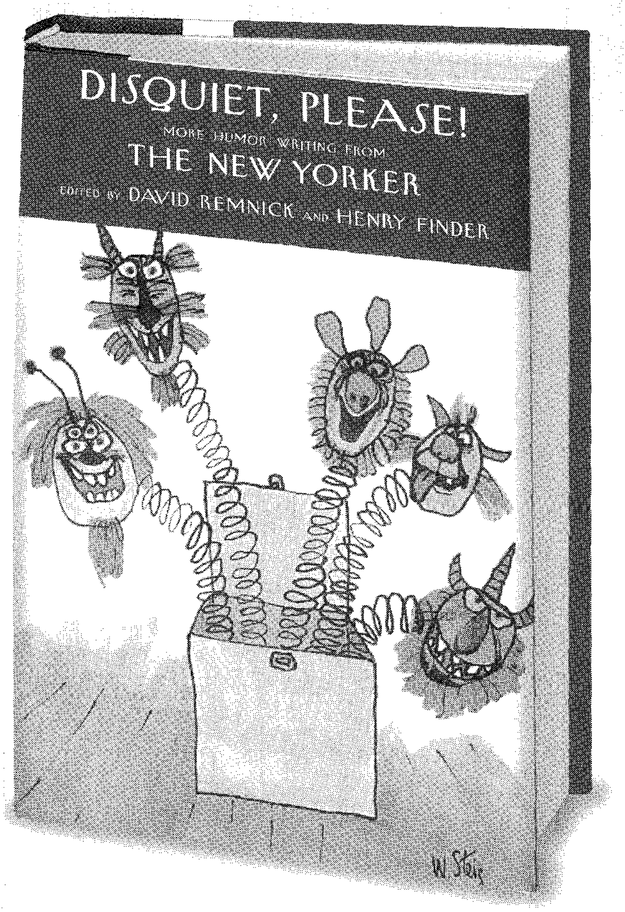

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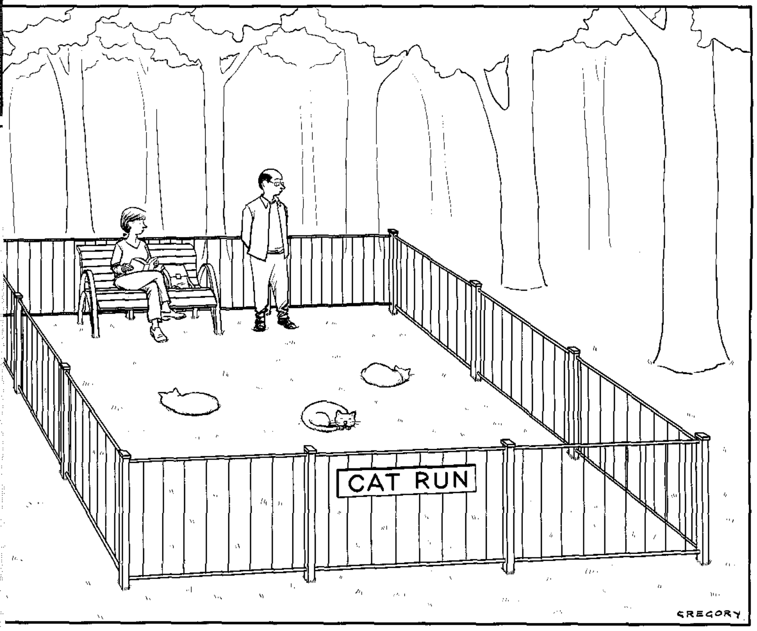

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nd, at John Adams's sugges- d the *Gazette's* motto to "A aintains the majesty of the en Massachusetts's royally overnor, Francis Bernard, l that Edes's paper "swarmed of the most atrocious kind," Edes and Gill with prosecu- urged the printers on. Do hem, "suffer yourselves to be t of your liberty by any pre- iteness, delicacy, or decency. ey are often used, are but for hypocrisy, chicanery, e."

ember 1, 1765, that Black ians staged a funeral for Lib- n the Liberty Tree. Edes's rted on similar funerals held colonies. Everywhere, the the same way. In Ports- Hampshire, a coffin was d neatly ornamented, on the n was wrote LIBERTY, aged D, computing from the Era thers landing at Plymouth." , a reprieve, otherworldly! was hardly ended before the ken up, it having been per- ome Remains of Life were stirs!

arliament, blindsided by the Colonial opposition, re- mp Act. GAZETTE, like his Y, woke from the dead. But on followed. In 1768, British soldiers landed in Boston to suppress the growing rebellion. During the occupation, Edes helped prepare a daily "Journal of the Times," featuring stories, most written by Samuel Adams and not all of them true, about atrocities committed by redcoats on the citizens, like the one about a woman who was raped by a soldier and who staggered across the Common, only to die beneath the Liberty Tree. The syndicated "Journal of the Times," printed in newspapers across the colonies, proved crucial to the resistance movement (and has been credited with originating the political exposé as a journalistic form). "Working the political Engine" is how John Adams described writing for Edes, after a night in 1769 spent "Cooking up Paragraphs" for "the Next Days newspaper." The following year, Edes, with the help of Samuel Adams and Paul Revere, turned the shooting by British soldiers of five rioting civilians into the "Boston Massacre." In 1773, the men who dumped the tea in Boston Harbor apparently changed into their disguises in the *Gazette's* back room. In 1774, a British commander gave his troops a list of men—including John Hancock and Sam Adams—who, the minute war broke out, were to be shot on sight, and he added a postscript: "N.B. Don't forget those trumpeters of sedition, the printers Edes and Gill."

By then, there were forty newspapers in the colonies. War came, to Lexington and Concord, on April 19, 1775. That night, in Boston—a city held by the British—Edes and Gill hastily dissolved their partnership. Gill went into hiding. Under cover of darkness, Edes, alone, carted his printing press and types to the Charles River, where he loaded them onto a boat moored at the bank, and rowed through the night to escape the siege. In a nearby town, he set up a makeshift printing shop, and, within weeks, managed to resume printing the *Gazette*, on lumpy paper, with gunky ink. In besieged Boston, British troops searched for Edes but, failing to find him, made do with his nineteen-year-old son. Peter Edes spent months as a prisoner of war. He watched from the window of his cell while a fellow-prisoner, a Boston painter, was beaten until, broken, he finally called out, "God bless the King."

Peter Edes survived. He became a printer. The war ended. It took some time to figure out what, in a republic, a newspaper was for. Although Benjamin Edes kept printing his *Gazette*, he had lost his best writers. Warren had died at the Battle of Bunker Hill. Otis had gone mad. John Adams had left Boston for good. The political landscape had changed, too. The Revolution was over; now was the time to constitute the nation. Former radicals had to find a way to build a stable government. Edes, like many other poor tradesmen and long-suffering revolutionaries, was stuck in a moment that had passed. He opposed the Constitution, which smacked, to him, of tyranny. He railed against it but found himself an anti-Federalist in a Federalist city. When the government of Massachusetts passed its own stamp tax, Edes argued against it, signing himself "The Printer's Friend."

In 1796, Edes's onetime friend John Adams defeated Thomas Jefferson and became President of the United States. Adams's high-handed and controversial Administration led to an even more opinionated press, as Marcus Daniel relates in his shrewd study of the newspaper wars of the seventeen-nineties. Printers, whether attacking Adams or, just as zealously, defending him, grew bolder and bolder. "Professions of impartiality I shall make none," the Federalist newspaperman William Cobbett wrote. "They are always useless, and are besides perfect nonsense." The printer of the *Connecticut Bee* promised to report

> Of turns of fortune, changes in the state,
> The fall of fav'rites, projects of the great,
> Of old mismanagements, taxations new,
> All neither wholly false, nor wholly true.

From 1790 to 1800, Republican printers founded seventy-two new papers (newspapers grew at four times the rate of the population), as Jeffrey Pasley reported in his 2001 study, "The Tyranny of Printers: Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic." In Hallowell, Maine, Peter Edes began printing the Kennebec *Gazette*. On page 1 of the first issue, he reprinted Alexander Hamilton's attack on Adams. (Hamilton deemed Adams a man plagued by "the unfortunate foibles of a vanity without bounds and a jealousy capable of discoloring every object.") In Philadelphia, Benjamin Franklin Bache, Benjamin Franklin's grandson, and later William Duane, edited the *Aurora*, a newspaper as passionately devoted to the cause of unseating John Adams from the Presidency as James Franklin's *Courant* had been to tipping over Cotton Mather's pulpit.

In July of 1798, Adams signed into law the Sedition Act, making defaming his Administration a federal crime. Adams had come to consider printers a scourge: rubbing your rulers is all well and good, but not when the ruler is you. Jefferson intended to run against Adams in the election of 1800. The Sedition Act was set to expire on March 3, 1801, the day before the new President would be inaugurated, leading many Americans to conclude that Adams simply wished to silence the opposition in order to insure his reëlection. Twenty-five people were arrested for sedition, fifteen indicted, and ten convicted; that ten included seven Republican journalists who, like the Edeses, supported Jefferson. Duane, who had earlier suffered much the same fate in India and in Britain, went to jail. Bache was spared trial only because he died of yellow fever before he could be brought to court. Thomas Cooper, a Republican editor, was charged with attempting to bring Adams "into contempt and disrepute and to excite against him the hatred of the good people of the United States." When Cooper, who served as his own counsel, tried to prove that everything he said about Adams was true (since only false statements defaming the government were, by the terms of the act, seditious), the court refused his request to subpoena the President, found the printer guilty, and sentenced him to six months in prison.

By then, Benjamin Edes was an old man, of declining powers. In 1797, he printed in his *Gazette* a pathetic appeal, trading on his past glories to beg for money, throwing himself "on the benevolence of that Public, to which, as an editor of a paper, I have for upwards of forty-one years been a faithful servant." Adams's Presidency left him despairing. Edes, that Trumpeter of Sedition, believed that Adams had betrayed everything his generation had fought for. Had they raised LIBERTY and her brother GAZETTE from the very grave, only to have Adams turn Grim Reaper? Edes, more than most, had reason to take that betrayal personally. It felled him. Two months after Congress passed the Sedition Act, Edes printed his final issue of the Boston *Gazette*. "And now, my Fellow-Citizens," he wrote, "I bid you FAREWELL! Maintain your Virtue—Cherish your Liberties." He closed his shop. He moved his printing press into his house. It filled the whole of his small parlor. He spent his days at his press, spectacles slipping down his nose, setting and unsetting types.

"The newspaper is dead, long live the newspaper!" has lately become the incantation of advocates of e-journalism, who argue that the twenty-first-century death of the newspaper hardly merits a moment's mourning, since it is no death at all but, rather, a rebirth. Even if that turns out to be true—and you have to hope it is true—the digital newspaper could do with a better slogan. Invoking the hereditary succession of a divine line of kings to celebrate the zippy thrill of reading an RSS feed on your iPhone runs counter to the history of the newspaper. Our rulers do not rule over us for as long as they live and, when they die, their heirs do not inherit their titles. That, in short, is what the beginning of the American newspaper was about.

To tell the story this way, as a struggle between tyranny and liberty, between King and Gazette, or even between John Adams and Benjamin Edes, is to write a Whig history, something that historians generally sniff at, mainly because eighteenth-century Whigs (and Whig printers) saw their world in just this way, with themselves on the side of liberty, and people aren't to be trusted in accounting for their own place in history. Whig history is suspect, in other words, for much the same reason that Benjamin Franklin's autobiography is suspect. It's too tidy. Most struggles, like most lives, are messier. Newspapers aren't always on the side of liberty. Not everyone agrees on what liberty means. Some struggles never end. And it's not the newspaper that's forever at risk of dying and needing to be raised from the grave. It's the freedom of the press.

Thomas Jefferson was inaugurated on March 4, 1801, the day after the Sedition Act expired. In his Inaugural Address, Jefferson talked about "the contest of opinion," a contest waged, in his lifetime, in the pages of the newspaper. Without partisan and even scurrilous printers pushing the limits of a free press in the seventeen-nineties, Marcus Daniel argues, the legitimacy of a loyal opposition never would have been established and the new nation, with its vigorous and democratizing political culture, might never have found its feet.

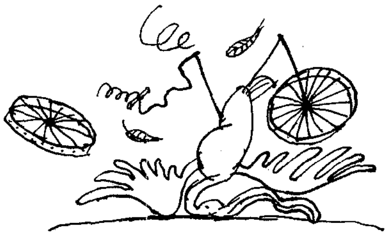
Soon after Jefferson came to power, he, like Adams, developed doubts about the unbounded liberty of the press. Printers, Jefferson complained, just days after his election, "live by the zeal they can kindle, and the schisms they can create." In his second Inaugural Address, Jefferson ranted against printers who had assaulted him with "the artillery of the press," warning that he had given some thought to prosecuting them. During his beleaguered second term, Jefferson suggested that newspapers ought to be divided into four sections: Truths, Probabilities, Possibilities, and Lies. What Jefferson wanted for the nation under his governance was a "union of opinion." But that, of course, can never be the aspiration of a democracy—a point that newspapers have been very good at making over the two centuries since.

Benjamin Edes didn't live to see the republic, and the newspaper, endure. Within three years of Jefferson's Inauguration, Edes died, destitute. In his will, he bequeathed to his son Peter a single font of types. The rest of his estate was sold, to settle his debts. It wasn't enough. ◆

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Piano Teacher, *by Janice Y. K. Lee (Viking; $25.95).* This cinematic tale of two love affairs in mid-century Hong Kong shows colonial pretensions tainted by wartime truths. Will Truesdale, a rootless, handsome Briton, arrives in the colony in 1941, and is swept up by Trudy Liang, the blithe and glamorous daughter of a Shanghai millionaire and a Portuguese beauty. They quickly become inseparable, their days spent in a whirl of parties and champagne, but when the Japanese invade, Will is interned and Trudy resorts to increasingly Faustian methods to survive. After the war, Claire Pendleton, the naïve wife of a British civil servant, arrives. She begins giving piano lessons to the daughter of a rich Chinese couple, and falls in love with their wounded and inscrutable driver: Will. Lee unfolds each story, and flits between them, with the brisk grace and discretion of the society she describes—a world in which horrors are adumbrated but seldom told.

The Impostor, *by Damon Galgut (Black Cat; $14).* Set in post-apartheid South Africa, this gripping novel explores the seamier aspects of reconciliation. Adam, adrift after losing his job to a young black candidate, moves to an isolated town to write poetry. Boredom sets in, relieved only by the appearance of an old school acquaintance, Canning, who invites Adam to spend weekends on his nearby game farm. There Adam meets Canning's wife, Baby, who is both alluring and chillingly aloof, and begins to realize that no one's motives are as pure as they appear. Galgut gives even seemingly innocuous details sinister overtones: the clicking of peacocks on a roof, the shuffling steps of Canning's elderly black servants. Beneath a fairly standard thriller plot (affairs, corruption) runs a critique of contemporary South Africa, from the venality of those enriched by a reinvigorated economy to the stale pieties of the white liberal class.



So Damn Much Money, *by Robert G. Kaiser (Knopf; $27.95).* Lobbying, Kaiser writes, is a business of "huge numbers and vague standards," forever reorienting itself in an effort to skate just inside the limits of legality. Kaiser follows the career of Gerald S. J. Cassidy, a kid from a poor family who became a lawyer for migrant workers, an aide to George McGovern, and, latterly, a lobbyist for universities, cranberries, defense contractors, and Taiwan. Cassidy pioneered the use of earmarks, fought to save the Seawolf submarine, and took congressmen to N.C.A.A. Final Four games. When George Bush came to power, Cassidy, despite his Democratic roots, scrambled to hire Republicans, including, briefly, Jack Abramoff, then on the brink of disgrace. Kaiser's account dwells less on blatant corruption than on what is perfectly, depressingly legal. Lobbyists, for all their policy-shaping aspirations, come across as simple bagmen, conveying cash between buyers in the private sector and all-too-willing sellers in Congress.

The Magician's Book, *by Laura Miller (Little, Brown; $25.99).* In this powerful meditation on "the schism between childhood and adult reading," Miller recounts her tumultuous relationship with the favorite books of her youth, C. S. Lewis's "Chronicles of Narnia." Filled from an early age with a distrust of the Catholic faith in which she was raised, Miller didn't notice the Christian subtext, and when she learned of it, as a teen-ager, she felt "tricked, cheated." Combining memoir, criticism, and biography, Miller takes Lewis to task for his "betrayals," including the racial stereotyping and élitism that, she argues, inform the books. Yet her respect for Lewis's talent remains; scrupulously placing him in his historical context, she crafts a nuanced portrait of the author as a sensitive curmudgeon and comes to the realization that "a perfect story is no more interesting or possible than a perfect human being."

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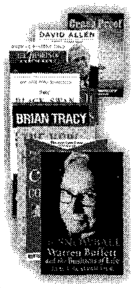

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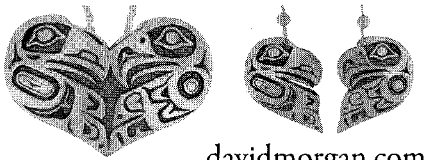

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POP MUSIC

LOGIC OF EXCESS

Kevin Barnes's disco semiotics.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

Kevin Barnes, of Of Montreal, has written, performed, and recorded many of its songs alone, but these days he is joined onstage by an increasing number of unpantsed musicians and painted performers. Since the band formed, eleven years ago, in Athens, Georgia, Barnes has been committed to the pleasures and the logic of excess. Why go for the usual themes when you can write a song called "Dustin Hoffman's Wife Calls in Detective to Dust for Porcelain Particles on Dustin Hoffman's Tongue" (from a 2001 release with "Dustin Hoffman" in every title) or "There Is Nothing Wrong with Hating Rock Critics"? If 2008 wasn't a big year for semiotics or for what Barnes calls "the depths of this phallocentric tyranny," it did no apparent harm to Of Montreal—its latest album, "Skeletal Lamping," is moving the band closer to the center of whatever the indie-rock conversation is now.

Barnes's bag of tricks is deep; David Bowie's bedazzled seventies rock is just as relevant as literary nods, disco highs are as appealing as melodic intricacy, and pleasure seems to drive every one of Barnes's impatient, rococo arrangements. "Skeletal Lamping," the group's ninth and best album, isn't just the most danceable; disco punches up the hedonism in Barnes's songwriting, and the steady 4/4 thump helps keep the fidgety songs from splintering.

In the nineties and early aughts, Barnes was roughly in step with his friends in a musical collective called Elephant 6. Along with bands like Elf Power, Of Montreal drew from several decades of melodic guitar pop, especially the English band XTC, and made rackety, exuberant rock albums. Barnes has a high, thin voice that often mimics a falsetto even when he's not singing falsetto. He could slip seamlessly into the chorus of a Zombies or a Beach Boys record. Pop's secular boys' choir is not so removed from the castrato voices of canonical disco acts like the Bee Gees and Sylvester, and Barnes began flirting with derivations of disco in 2005, on the album "The Sunlandic Twins," with songs like "I Was Never Young" (an uncommonly plain phrase for him) and "Wraith Pinned to the Mist and Other Games" (much more like it). Of Montreal came closer to being a de-jure dance band on 2007's celebrated "Hissing Fauna, Are You the Destroyer?"

"Skeletal Lamping" continues in this vein, and although it is not always formally dance music, it dances, and rarely leaves the old-fashioned joys of song form behind. Barnes could never settle for dance music's heartbeat—long stretches of repetition—because his compositions flicker too rapidly. So it is perhaps more helpful to think of Of Montreal as one big dance d.j. rather than as representative of any genre of dance music itself. The songs on "Skeletal Lamping" are like mini mix tapes; strung together, it's just a whole lot of mixing.

If you want to know exactly how A.D.D. a Barnes song can get, go to the seven-minute "Plastis Wafers," which could be a self-contained primer on "Skeletal Lamping." The song has four main sections, and touches on many of the sounds and ideas that Barnes returns to: sexuality, books, disco, progressive seventies rock, androgynous vocals, the shortest distance between two styles, and the entanglement of clear language and ambiguous feelings. Early in the song's light-footed opening, which might be an Italian disco track from 1981, Barnes sings, "I confess to really being quite charmed by your feminine effects, you're the only one with whom I would role play Oedipus Rex." For Barnes, reading and music and sex all seem to be connected to the same central pleasure node. Barnes knows he's dealing with heady material, which might be why "Skeletal Lamping" is stuffed with so many different sounds and melodies and parts.

On "Hissing Fauna," he recounts bonding with a girl over Georges Bataille's "Story of the Eye." (There is a generation of eighties semiotics students who wish that Barnes had been around twenty years earlier, to make critical theory a little easier to use on dates. But then we had Green Gartside, of Scritti Politti—another writer Barnes has an affinity with, as far as androgyny, literature, and affection for disco are concerned.) After asking his object to be his "pleasure puss" and comparing two sets of hands to "four excited spiders," Barnes skips from lighter disco to a slightly heavier groove. (These sections are striated into subdivisions.) In one rhapsodic sub-bridge, which sounds a little like a languid Pink Floyd track, Barnes assures his lover that "you and I are friends, not some polemic to be puzzled over." On "Hissing Fauna," he made the connection to David Bowie's work almost explicit, by developing an alter ego named Georgie Fruit. Live shows began to feature more and more costumes and nudity, sometimes involving Barnes dropping trou entirely. Of Montreal became a roving sideshow in face paint, glitter, and ruffles—anything to upend what Barnes would likely call "normative."

Barnes pushes at definitions. When he sings, "I'm just a black she-male, and I don't know what you people are all about," on "Wicked Wisdom," from "Skeletal Lamping," it doesn't seem as genuine as his love for Bataille; it is perhaps a way to scare off anyone who doesn't want to play the most unorthodox version of indie rock possible. Actually, "indie rock" barely applies to Of Montreal as anything but a description of the people who come to see it. What do you call music with horn parts reminiscent of both Burt Bacharach and Prince?

There's a bargain with the audience when Of Montreal plays live. In the studio, Barnes has tight control over his hundreds of skeins and can knit everything together and check all the seams. (After a dozen listens, "Skeletal Lamping" doesn't feel at all jumpy or impatient. Barnes may like to change positions a lot, but he rarely loses track of where the song is.) Onstage, it is considerably harder to reproduce the precision of machines. The pleasure substitute here is spectacle. At a performance last month at the Music Hall of Williamsburg, Barnes wore some appealing tight blue bits and pieces, and disrobed extensively. The bigger thrills were left to the non-playing members of the show. The set began with four people draped in gold fabric topped by gold masks, staring at the crowd like Aztec statues that had taken a notion to move about. During the show, a small clutch of agents dressed in black ran around the audience and then painted people with red face paint. The biggest stunt was a supersized puppet operated by five people, one for the head and one for each big fuzzy limb.

Of Montreal's sideshow: face paint, glitter, ruffles. Photograph by Mackenzie Stroh.

CONTOUR BY GETTY IMAGES

The band brought this bit of theatre along when they performed "An Eluardian Instance" on the "Late Show with David Letterman." As much as I salute Barnes and his cohorts for importing pageant and chaos to the stage, it's all a little half-baked compared to the music running through Barnes's head. Of Montreal would have to be a band on a par with the seventies version of Parliament to deliver both theatre and top-quality dance music. That kind of performance skirts Broadway in terms of complexity and production-value demands, and a touring band is going to have a hard time hitting those heights. In Barnes's case, the spectacle is already in the sound. ♦

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THE THEATRE

BY THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH

Young Jean Lee's irreverent take on racial politics.

BY HILTON ALS

One generally hesitates before identifying a new trend in the American theatre, largely because language has a tendency to fix and limit the joy one feels at witnessing the stops and starts, the moments of grace, and the moments of awkwardness in the work of a fledgling director, performer, or playwright. One senses, however, that the thirty-four-year-old playwright and director Young Jean Lee wouldn't be content with inchoate praise for her work—work that is both explicitly political in content and often mundane in tone. Like her contemporaries the up-and-coming playwrights David Adjmi and Thomas Bradshaw (Bradshaw performed in one of Lee's early pieces), Lee is a facetious provocateur; that is, she does whatever she can to get under our skin—with laughs and with raw, brutal talk that at times feels gratuitous, and is meant to.

Beneath the surface, Lee seems to say in her work, most people are cauldrons of awfulness. Political correctness is a front—and, by now, a tattered one. Any talk of race in our post-"Raisin in the Sun" world seems like a tired joke. In a 2007 interview in *American Theatre*, Lee said of her 2005 play, "Songs of the Dragons Flying to Heaven"—a powerful, humorous, and startling work about the author's violence toward herself and, subsequently, toward her female Asian characters—"For this project, I decided the worst thing I could possibly do was to make an Asian-American identity-politics show, because it can be a very formulaic, very clichéd genre, and very assimilated into white American culture. It's almost become part of the dominant white power structure to have identity-politics plays about how screwed-over minorities are. It's such a familiar, soothing pattern. . . . It's become the status quo."

Lee knows something about the tensions of trying to assimilate. When she was two, her family emigrated from Korea to Pullman, Washington. After finishing high school there, she earned a B.A. at the University of California at Berkeley, in 1996, and was accepted into the university's Ph.D. program in English. Six years later, she abandoned academia and came to New York to pursue a career in theatre. By then, she was already a presence on the downtown scene, staging work that often featured a female character who was the target of some form of abuse. In her 1995 piece, "Pullman, WA," a young woman named Tory berates the audience and herself in the second person—"You have taken on way more responsibility than you can handle. . . . Your feelings of anxiety are fucking up your focus and productivity"—while a man named Pete goads her into further self-abnegation. The world Lee represents here is fuguelike and small, a culture in which men prey on the standard female anxieties. Tory is convinced that she's not doing enough in the world, for the world, and that she needs a man to remind her of her deficiencies; Pete's criticism provides her with a dreadful form of sustenance.

Jennings, Workman, Onayemi, and Onodowan in "The Shipment."

ANA JUAN

By the time Lee wrote "Songs of the Dragons Flying to Heaven," she had learned how to pull more of the world into her dramaturgical constructions. A young woman called simply "Korean-American" says to the audience near the start of the play:

> Have you ever noticed how most Asian-Americans are slightly brain-damaged from having grown up with Asian parents? It's like being raised by monkeys—these retarded monkeys who can barely speak English and are too evil to understand anything besides conformity and status. . . . Asian people from Asia are even more brain-damaged, but in a different way, because they are the original monkey. . . . I am so mad about all of the racist things against me in this country, which is America. Like the fact that the reason why so many white men date Asian women is that they can get better-looking Asian women than they can get white women because we . . . have lower self-esteem. It's like going with an inferior brand so that you can afford more luxury features.

Take "white" and "Asian" out of this speech, and you're left with the whiny lament of a discontented teen. Where does language take this character? What is she expressing, beyond a generalized self-loathing? And is what she has to say about race somehow validated by the fact that she herself is Asian? That is, do we accept what she has to say about Asians because she's speaking from the "inside"?

These kinds of questions come to the fore in Lee's most recent work. At the start of "The Shipment" (at the Kitchen, through January 24th) the stage is bare. We're looking at a brick wall. Suddenly, we hear a loud, rhythmically intense song. Two black men (Prentice Onayemi and the outstandingly funny, high-haired Mikeah Ernest Jennings) are dressed in some version of black tie and sporting white shoes. The two actors sprint, wheel, and cavort soundlessly. As the music winds down, we hear a voice shout "New York City!," and Douglas (the charismatic Douglas Scott Streater) enters. A little full of himself, he looks like a young Ivan Dixon. Holding his mike like a billy club, he's a sort of street comedian, or a talkative thug, which, in Lee's hands, comes down to the same thing:

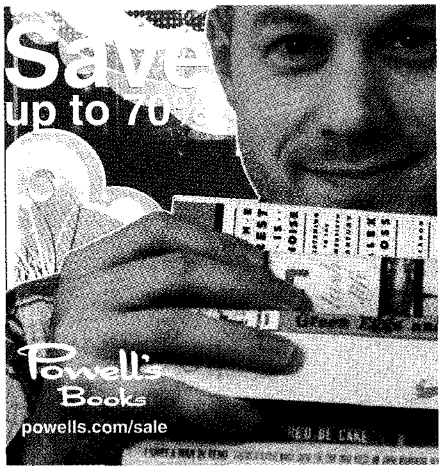
> Douglas: Now, I know some a you thinkin', Why do black comedians still do those "White people are like this, black people are like that" jokes? Well, I'll tell you why. *I don't mind to be offensive by sayin' this*—but white people be evil. (*Gives the audience a deadly serious look.*) Naw, I'm just playin' wit' chall. Most white folks ain't evil—they just stupid. . . . You think I ENJOY talkin' 'bout race? I wanna talk about POOP, mothafucka!

Douglas talks shit. He also talks about defecation. Lee wants to remind us that this is all part of black parlance: *Ain't this some shit?* But, more important, why do we listen? And what do we do with what we hear? Lee makes her audience walk a knife's edge of race and meaning. How does blackness sound? And how have we been conditioned to hear black speech? After Douglas's monologue, we're treated to a series of verging-on-ridiculous short scenes that follow the rise and fall of a young rapper named Omar (Okieriete Onodowan). First, we see Omar being chastised by his mother (the lovely Amelia Workman), who is a parody of the struggling black matriarch.

> Mama: Omar, wake up! Wake up! You have to go to school so that you can be a doctor.
>
> Omar: *I want to be a rap star!*
>
> Mama: I worked three jobs and raised six children and ten grandchildren by myself so that you would be a doctor!
>
> Omar: But rapping is my dream.

Lee, directing her cast brilliantly—she's very aware of what each performer can do—has the actors deliver their lines, in this section of the work, as mechanically as possible, perhaps in an effort to separate meaning from content, "staged" blackness from the "naturalistic" version. (The director and writer George C. Wolfe opened the door to this approach in his 1986 parodic sketch, "The Last Mama-on-the-Couch Play.") As "The Shipment" goes on, Lee exploits every aspect of the racist view of a rapper's life. Omar meets a "video ho," who wants him to "do stuff" to her "booty," encounters drug kingpins, witnesses drive-by shootings, and so on, to the point of absurdity. Finally, three of the cast members interrupt the narrative and break into song, a cappella and in all seriousness: "I might disintegrate into the thin air if you'd like / I'm not the dark center of the universe like you thought." The actors disperse.

In semi-darkness, two stagehands start building a set. We find ourselves in the swank living room of Douglas, now called Thomas. He's a trickster in a penthouse, and he's hosting a party. All the actors have converged, but they speak differently now, more formally, and their language is more "dramatic." There are antagonists and protagonists here, traditional theatrical distinctions that you couldn't quite sort out in the more frenetic, visceral part of the evening. Thomas starts to reveal all sorts of awful secrets about his guests. But no one seems able to leave the room. The atmosphere is straight out of Luis Buñuel's "Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie," which is the point that Lee is making onstage: the same actors are ostensibly playing the same roles, but they're different to us now, transformed by the affluent setting and by their pinched diction. The setting has made them white—another social construct. This is so ingenious a twist, such a radical bit of theatrical smoke and mirrors, that, in rethinking everything that has come before—all that "black" language, all those "black" situations—we are forced to confront our own preconceived notions of race. And to agree with Lee that we may not live long enough to purge ourselves of them. ♦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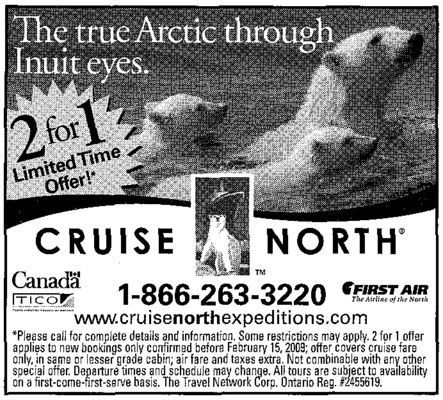

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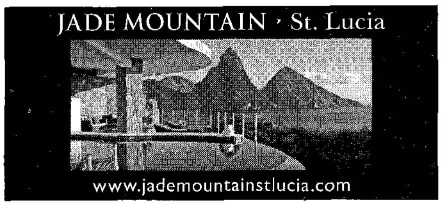

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JAZZ

GUITAR HERO

Bill Frisell's infinite styles.

BY GARY GIDDINS

The fearless and adaptable guitarist Bill Frisell, whose varied endeavors have drawn him into free-form extemporizations, symphonic collaborations, hard and soft rock, country, and accompaniments for Buster Keaton silent films, is primarily associated with two of jazz's border towns, each of which he helped put on the map. The first might be called Jazz Americana, and Frisell is at home there thanks to his uncanny knack for writing music that sounds a lot older than his fifty-seven years. "History, Mystery" (Nonesuch), one of two recently released disks, features standard jazz instrumentation augmented by strings, and suggests a carrousel ride from which the view is blurrily familiar. Much of the album is in waltz time, including one of three versions of an older Frisell composition, "Monroe" (as in Bill, the father of bluegrass). Another version of "Monroe," for guitar and cello, sounds a bit like the kind of tune Ken Burns might cue for the aftermath of Antietam.

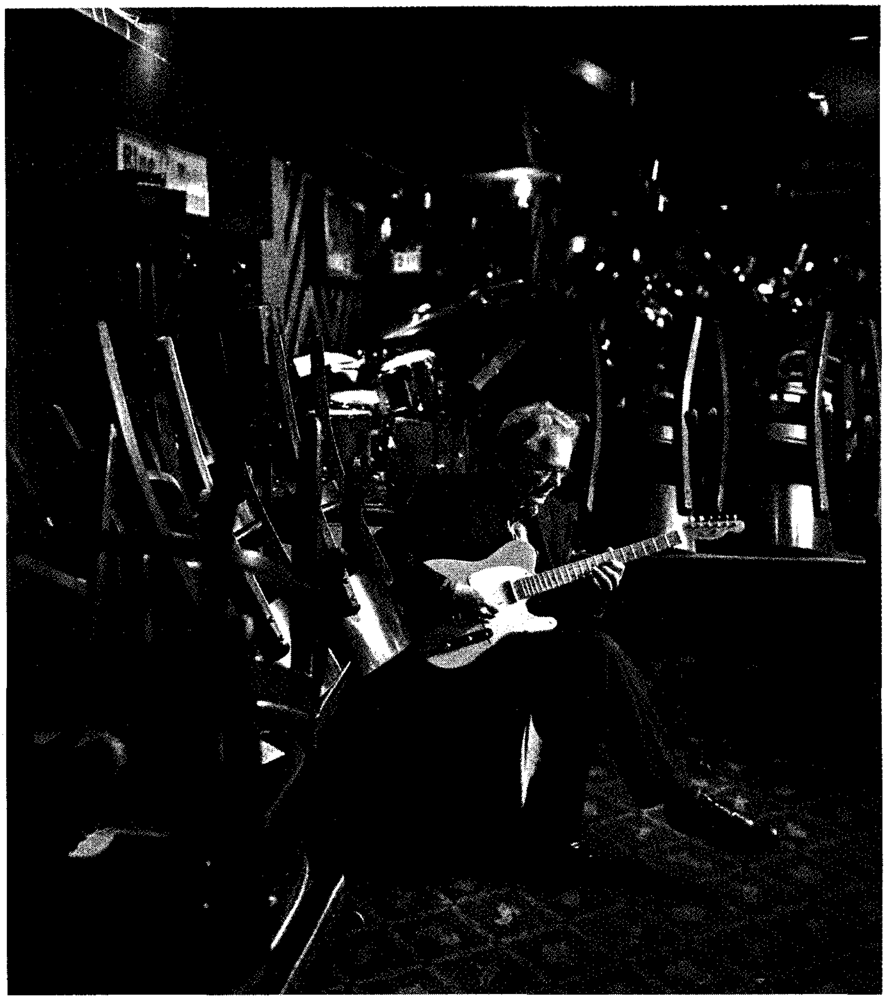
But as one listens it becomes clear that there is something else going on. The mood of nostalgic pastiche is repeatedly broken—by two knotty jazz classics, Lee Konitz's "Sub-Conscious Lee" and Thelonious Monk's "Jackieing," and by some quizzical micro-compositions, some less than forty seconds long, which Frisell sprinkles through the album, with names like "Question," "Answer," and "A Momentary Suspension of Doubt." Such moments are telegrams from Frisell's other border-town residence, which we might call Minefield America, a forbidding territory of ascetic, chesslike improvisations—multidirectional interactions in which every note counts, every modulation is eventful, and intense concentration is a prerequisite for player and listener alike. Monk is the patron saint of this kind of playing; even his simplest-sounding themes were often fraught with structural and harmonic snares. As John Coltrane memorably recalled, "If you didn't keep aware all the time of what was going on, you'd suddenly feel as if you'd stepped into an empty elevator shaft."

Frisell has made many recordings in this vein, and, given his interest in jazz traditions, it's fitting that he has often undertaken these explorations with players a generation older. A few months after "History, Mystery" came the release of "Jim Hall & Bill Frisell: Hemispheres" (ArtistShare), in which Frisell duets with his former teacher, who has long since graduated to living-legend status. And the other week, at the Blue Note, he appeared with the bassist Ron Carter and the drummer Paul Motian—alumni of Miles Davis and Bill Evans groups, respectively—in a set that retooled the repertory, and rekindled the charm, of an album that the trio made in 2006. Frisell's work with musicians he grew up admiring reveals contradictory impulses. As an instrumentalist, he has enormous ambition, and is devoted to the idea that the guitar can be orchestral in reach. Manipulating his sound with an array of digital effects, to produce real-time ostinato loops or to simulate the delicate chimes of a celesta, he creates expansive, echoing canvases for his collaborators to work on. But, as a guy on the bandstand, he is deferential, perpetually stuck in the mode of an eager youngster—the boy who grew up in Denver playing clarinet and guitar, and haunted Walgreens to buy every record he could afford.

Frisell's diffidence may have been enforced by a long apprenticeship. Born in 1951, he didn't gain a foothold in jazz until the late seventies, when he became a session guitarist for the ECM label. During the next decade, he became a Zelig figure, a quiet, bespectacled, but musically charged presence on every kind of session, absorbing the styles of Motian, Joey Baron, Julius Hemphill, John Zorn, Joe Lovano, Ronald Shannon Jackson, Tim Berne, John Scofield, Don Byron, Dave Holland, and other players who have little in common beyond their conspicuous individualism. His style—a confident, spare attack that suggests both modesty and calculation—reflects his appreciation of Hall, Wes Montgomery, John McLaughlin, and Jimi Hendrix. Though he has said that he considers himself a jazz guitarist in everything he does, his capacious embrace of other precincts in American music has led him to find similarities that had generally escaped notice. In Hank Williams's "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry," he hears chord changes similar to those in Miles Davis's "All Blues." He interpolates Monk's "Misterioso" in "You Are My Sunshine," and vice versa. And, at a time when guitarists routinely customize their gear to refine a signature sound, Frisell stays with the Fender Telecaster, the oldest mass-produced solid-body guitar, with its deep history in country, blues, and early rock.

At the Blue Note, the trio opened with "You Are My Sunshine." Frisell engaged Carter's bass in short melodic exchanges, while Motian pattered around the drums, punctuating each fragment like an editor tidying up a manuscript. Things opened up a little with Carter's "Eighty-One," a blues he had written for Miles Davis's "E.S.P." (The piece is a classic of Minefield America, famous for its open terrain between notes.) But here, and in a couple of Motian compositions that followed, the stop-start patterns, controlled and austere, suggested the diminished emotional vitality that can occur when performers subordinate their egos in a musical non-aggression pact. That all changed during "Strange Meeting," perhaps Frisell's best-known tune and another musical minefield, with unusually static harmonies and an irregular structure featuring an elongated bridge section. In this landscape, Carter quietly declared his eminence with smooth virtuosity and an implacable four-beat walk that, far from raising the nominal leader's hackles, pleased him so much that he essentially put the rest of the set in Carter's hands. A version of Carter's "Little Waltz" evolved into a bass concerto, buoyant with twinkling harmonics, sliding pitches (Carter likes to play with the pegs), and double-, triple-, and quadruple-stopped chords. As Carter played, Frisell reverted to the role of sideman. Indeed, there were times, as he nodded and smiled in response to the nuances of Carter's improvisation, when he strongly resembled a middle-aged jazz fan enjoying every beat of a Ron Carter solo.

You can hear a similar dynamic at work in "Hemispheres," Frisell's new album with Jim Hall. The setting is informal—small extraneous noises betray the fact that the recording took place at the home of a musician friend—and the repertory, played in duet or joined by bass and drums, is eclectic. Along with numbers by Hall and Frisell, there are blues and standards (including Hall's major-minor key arrangement of "My Funny Valentine," first recorded as a duet with Bill Evans) and a dramatic rendering of Bob Dylan's "Masters of War." There is a palpable sense of Frisell's delight at being in the company of a man who is not only his teacher and mentor but also a heroic stylist, capable of announcing his presence with a single note. Indeed, one such note is a highlight of the album. It occurs four and a half minutes into a lengthy free improvisation called "Migration." Up to that point, Frisell has been offering loops and chords and riffs, trying to create a sonic background that will engage his partner's interest, as Hall sits silently by. Suddenly, a lone commanding note signals Hall's entrance, and you can practically see Frisell smiling with relief. A few minutes later, it's hard to tell who's playing what. ♦



Frisell at the Blue Note, January 7, 2009. Photograph by Danny Clinch.

NEWYORKER.COM

A video of Bill Frisell.

THE CURRENT CINEMA

BRIEF LIVES

"Notorious," "Cherry Blossoms," and "Wendy and Lucy."

BY DAVID DENBY

Christopher Wallace, who became known as the rapper Biggie Smalls, or the Notorious B.I.G., was born in 1972 and was brought up in Bedford-Stuyvesant by his mother, Voletta Wallace, a middle-class woman from Jamaica. When Chris dropped out of school, at the age of seventeen, and became a crack dealer, it was not for lack of love or support; Voletta, a teacher who eventually earned a master's degree in education, adored him. In the next few years, Wallace was in and out of jail, and he carried a gun at times. An inveterate scribbler, he had written down rhymes since he was a boy, and he made some tapes that came to the attention of the rap entrepreneur Sean (Puffy) Combs, who helped him shape his material and brought out his first album, "Ready to Die," in 1994. Organically conceived, with a narrative line chronicling Biggie's youth and his life on the streets, the album announced his belief that a violent death would be his inevitable fate. Biggie boasted and taunted his way through songs with a masterly control of rhythm, internal rhyme, metaphor, and story. After the album was released, he became embroiled in the wars between East Coast and West Coast rappers, and in 1997, following a party in Los Angeles, he was shot and killed. He was twenty-four years old; his second album, "Life After Death," came out two weeks after he died.

Was Chris Wallace a nice middle-class boy who put himself in danger because he sensed that, in order to become a rap artist, he needed to pack the street into his résumé? "If you was a nice, ordinary kid, you was an easy mark for the wannabe gangsters," he says at the beginning of the new biopic "Notorious"—meaning that he had no choice but to be a tough. Still, the authenticity issue lingers around hip-hop, which is a cunningly crafted show-business phenomenon as well as an expression of urban culture. What I wanted from the movie was some clarity about Biggie Smalls's motives and a sense of how much of him was created and how much was genuine. What I got was both conventional and confused—an uneasy mixture of biographical snapshots and ham-handed moralism, arrayed in a dual narrative track in which Biggie (Jamal Woolard) haplessly slides toward death as he slowly, and with many steps backward, rises spiritually toward manhood. Written by Reggie Rock Bythewood and Cheo Hodari Coker, and directed by George Tillman, Jr., the movie teaches various lessons without saying anything coherent or illuminating. The man who wrote songs with such titles as "Me and My Bitch," and lyrics like "Niggaz on the corner/I ain't forget you niggaz/My triple beam niggaz, word up," is shown listening to Richard Pryor on TV as he says that "nigger" should be dropped from the language. How are we supposed to take that? As a rebuke to Biggie? As his true opinion? And, shortly before Biggie dies, he instructs his little daughter never to allow any man to call her "bitch." Is he simply contradicting himself? Is he a hypocrite? Did he have regrets? Or are the filmmakers attempting to clean him up for posterity? Voletta Wallace is a co-producer of the film (as are Biggie's managers, and Sean Combs is the executive producer), and, as the movie tells it, Biggie, at twenty-four, is on the verge of becoming the honorable son she always wanted him to be. Whether this is true or not, I'm pretty sure that it's not a good idea for an artist's mother to control any part of his biography. No doubt Mme. Rimbaud, given the chance, would have preferred to have her disreputable Arthur come out looking like a precocious Catholic schoolboy who only briefly dabbled in absinthe. In the movie, Voletta (the sternly upright Angela Bassett) is a saint with a powerful tongue, and Sean Combs (Derek Luke) is an artistic and commercial genius with infallible taste and judgment. The movie leaves us with the sense that, twelve years after Biggie Smalls's death, a lot of people are trying to extract whatever profit or pride they can from the chaotic life of a young man who was, as he well knew, a work in progress.

Jamal Woolard as the late Biggie Smalls, a.k.a. the Notorious B.I.G.

ISTVAN BANYAI

When swagger is what you're selling, swagger may have to be manufactured, though what counts in the end is the work itself, whatever experience is behind it. As Biggie, the heavyset rapper Jamal Woolard comes off, to my eyes, as a man with a gentler face and temper than the original, but when Woolard sings, changing his flow to match Biggie's, he's both powerful and persuasive. The songs still have a coruscating insistence, and I would have liked to learn more about the professional details—how Biggie wrote the songs, how much rehearsal and how many retakes were needed to get the music into its final form.

The movie jumps restlessly from one flimsily established turning point to the next: Biggie breaking promises to one woman after another (including his mother); Biggie making friends with the brilliant, erratic West Coast rapper Tupac Shakur (Anthony Mackie) and then reacting with bewilderment when Shakur turns on him. George Tillman not only jumps around restlessly in Biggie's life; he leaps, in vintage MTV style, from angle to angle within a given scene, and the moods never settle in—we never understand why Biggie makes the decisions he does. In the end, he seems trapped not so much in a fated existence as in a poorly organized biopic. Maybe a life this tumultuous can't be jammed into a two-hour movie. A miniseries may be the dramatic form that would make Biggie Smalls a convincing man, though the songs, as a brief, searing outburst, probably provide the strongest sense of him that we will ever get.

So much of cinema is given over to rapid movement, frenzy, and abrupt montage that it's easy to forget that the medium also has a fluent way with stillness and silence—the long, hard stare of the camera which isolates and celebrates the essence of something. Both Doris Dörrie's "Cherry Blossoms," a strangely poetic evocation of the cycles of grief and renewal, and Kelly Reichardt's "Wendy and Lucy," a mournful tribute to a young female drifter (Michelle Williams), are filled with landscapes, buildings, faces, *things*, many of them examined with a rapt attention that releases us from the fast-moving dazzle that is now so commonly (and exhaustingly) familiar.

The German writer-director Dörrie, whose film "Men" was a hit here in 1986, starts with a seemingly stolid, retired middle-aged couple in Bavaria, Trudi (Hannelore Elsner) and Rudi (Elmar Wepper), who travel around to vacation spots without much purpose. Their grown children, two of whom they visit in Berlin, are still obsessed with separating themselves from their parents, and the visit produces irritation and selfish indifference, even embarrassment. It certainly never occurs to the children that Mom and Dad have inner lives. But it turns out that Trudi, as a young woman, was fascinated by Butoh, an amalgam of German Expressionism and Japanese avant-garde dance techniques. Performed in white makeup, Butoh expresses states of transition—taut hands revolving and thrusting, and a sudden crumpling torso appear to invite death and then to repel it. When Trudi dies, the grief-stricken Rudi goes to Tokyo to visit their third child, a lonely young man who had moved far away to escape his dependence on his mother, and he quickly falls in with a young woman whom he sees performing Butoh alongside a canal. She's mourning the death of her own mother, and, together, they make a pilgrimage to Mt. Fuji, which becomes an appropriate setting for the improbable transformation of a middle-aged, gut-heavy Bavarian into a dancer enacting his grief. The movie's conceits are just barely endurable, but the sharpness of Dörrie's eye—for Tokyo's electric night, for Fuji's iconographic landscapes, for cherry blossoms—sustains emotion even when story logic fails.

Michelle Williams's drifter, Wendy, stuck in Oregon, is neither crazy nor criminal, but she has less sense than a quiet creature in the woods. She merely exists, harmless but obdurate, a slight, wandering woman without a discernible past whose only allegiance is to her yellow-brown mutt, Lucy. The movie has been called an early portent of recession-era blues, but it's hard to see what work Wendy could do even in boom times. She has an idea of finding a job in Alaska, but it's so vague that it seems more a dream than a plan. The society that she lives in is as indifferent to her as she is to it—some people help her, others brush her off, and she never connects with anyone but an elderly security guard. She's infuriating, but the movie, for all its morose impassivity, is beautiful and haunting. As Williams plays her, Wendy is full of feeling, and, as skinny as she is, she has a palpable, fleshy presence. Kelly Reichardt seems to be saying, "Yes, she merely exists—isn't that enough?" She won't go away, and Reichardt immerses her in Oregon's summer light, its forests as seen from a moving train. The cinematography is so tactile that even a run-down building stirs us with its purchase on its given space in the world. A contemplative movie like this clears all the whirling, meaningless imagery out of our heads. ♦

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Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Tom Cheney, must be received by Sunday, January 25th. Finalists in the January 12th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the February 9th & 16th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

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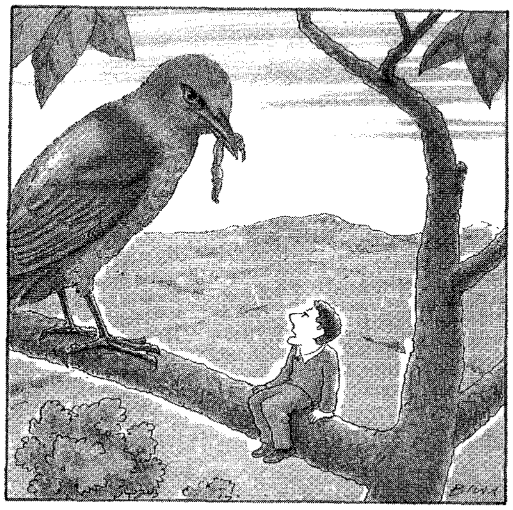
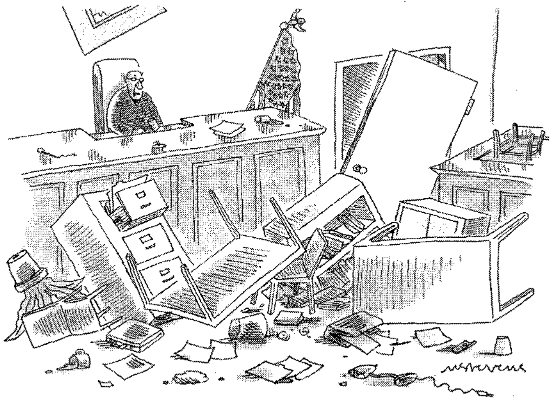


"I want to live at my dad's."
Sean Delaney, Stanardsville, Va.



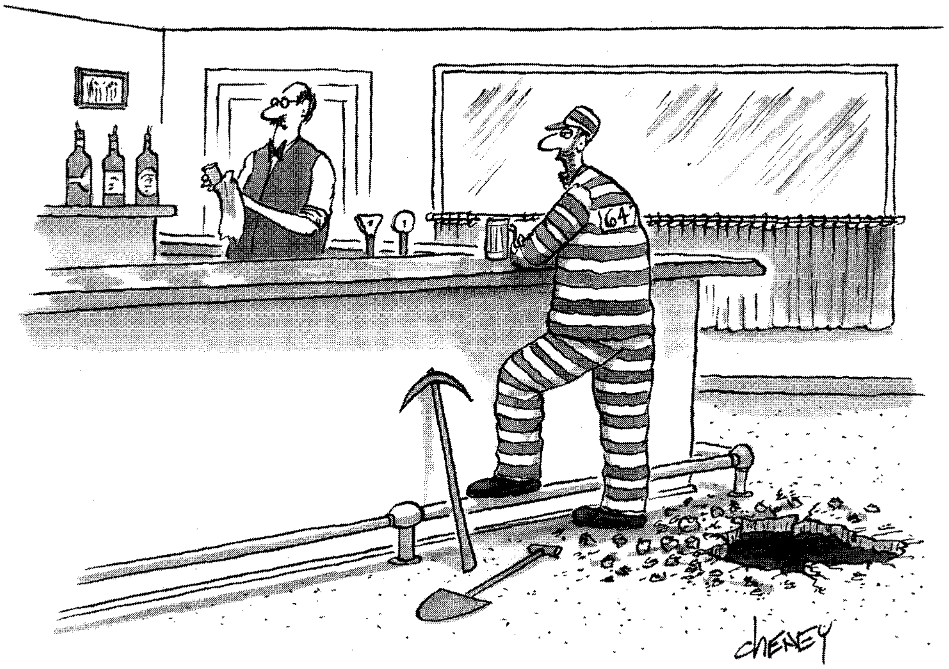
THE FINALISTS

"This is what I get for convicting the janitor."
Sita Chandrika Palepu, New York City

"For a divorce case, that went smoothly."
Ann Seger, Chicago, Ill.

"Sorry about that—new gavel."
Tommy Bryant, Cochran, Ga.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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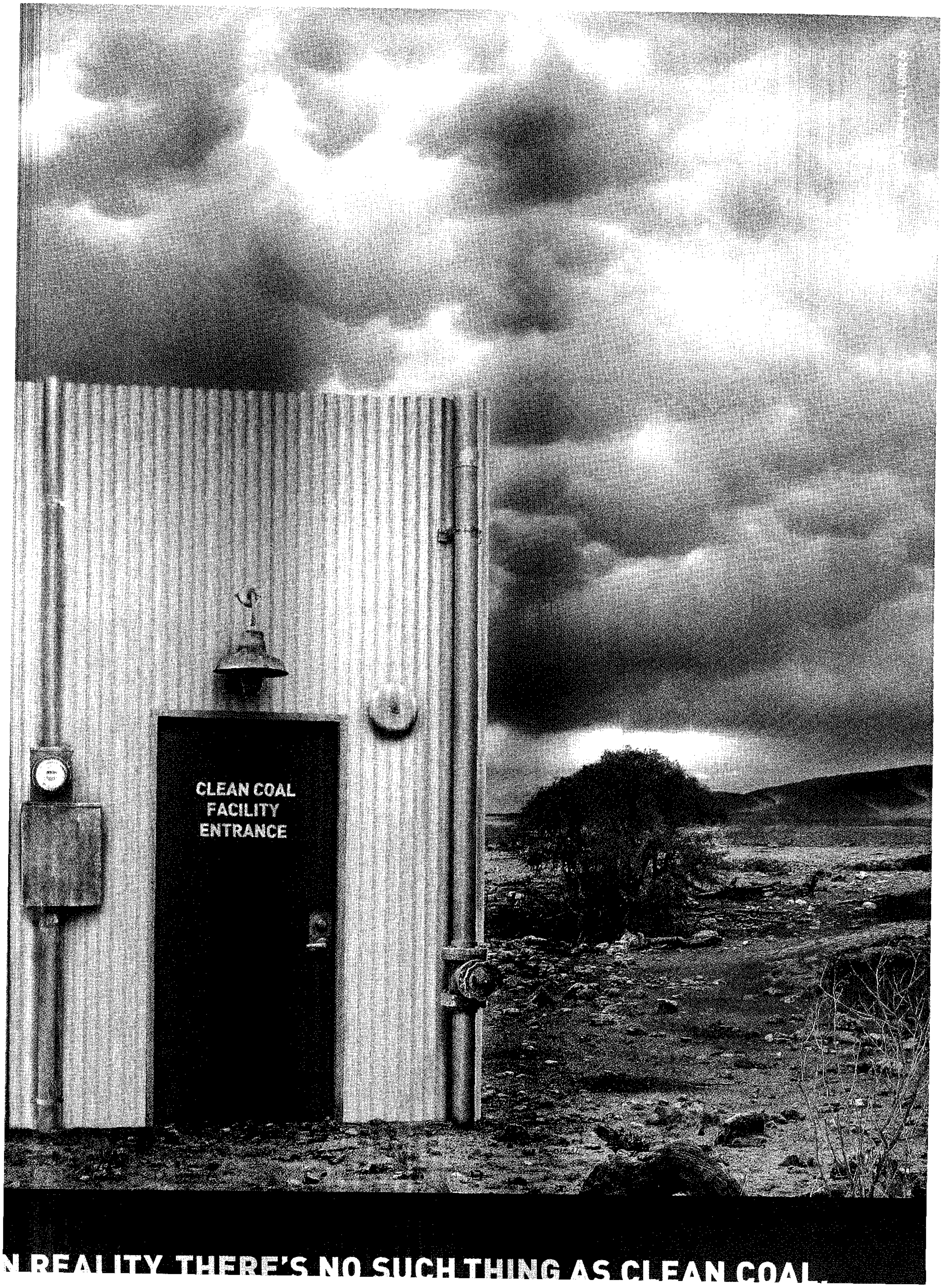
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Parent-Teen Driving Contract

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AGREEMENT

CONSEQUENCES

CRASHES
Sixteen-year-old drivers have crash rates that are three times greater than 17-year-old drivers and five times greater than 18-year-old drivers.

AGREEMENT

CONSEQUENCES

DRINKING AND DRIVING
In 2005, drunk driving caused one of every four fatal teen crashes.

AGREEMENT

CONSEQUENCES

CELL PHONES, MUSIC, OTHER DISTRACTIONS
Talking on a cell phone while driving gives you the reaction time of a 70-year-old.

AGREEMENT

CONSEQUENCES

TIME OF DAY
Half the teens that died in car crashes in 2005 were killed between 3 p.m. and midnight. Check your local teen driving curfews.

AGREEMENT

CONSEQUENCES

NUMBER OF PASSENGERS
According to a recent study, the presence of just one more male teen in a car doubles the chance of a fatal crash.

AGREEMENT

CONSEQUENCES

SEATBELTS
Using lap/shoulder belts can reduce the risk of dying in a car crash by 45%.

AGREEMENT

CONSEQUENCES

GRADES
Good grades are important for a teen's future. Consider ways to link driving privileges to good grades.

AGREEMENT

CONSEQUENCES

TEEN DRIVER
I promise to abide by the contract outlined above. If I break any part of this contract, I will accept the consequences. During any time that I cannot drive, I will be responsible for making other arrangements to get around.

SIGNATURE OF TEEN DRIVER DATE

PARENT/GUARDIAN
I promise to do what I can to help my teenager succeed in following this contract. I promise to make time to help my child become a safe and responsible driver. I understand this is an evolving contract and promise to make myself available to discuss these rules and their consequences when necessary.

SIGNATURE OF PARENT(S)/GUARDIAN(S) DATE

Go to an Allstate Agent or to www.allstate.com/teen for an interactive contract you can save, print and update.

Allstate.
You're in good hands.

When it comes to teens taking risks behind the wheel, parents do matter. Fact is, 75% of teens say their parents would be the best influence in getting them to drive more safely.

Visit your Allstate Agent for a free copy of the Allstate Parent-Teen Driving Contract. Or download an interactive contract you can save, print and update at allstate.com/teen.

It's time to make the world a safer place to drive. That's Allstate's Stand.

Allstate.
You're in good hands.

Auto
Home
Life
Retirement

Source: The Allstate Foundation Report on Teen Driving, 2005. The Cupped Hands logo is a registered service mark and "That's Allstate's Stand" is a service mark of Allstate Insurance Company, Northbrook, IL.

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